

# **WELCOME TO ISLAM**

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## INTRODUCTION

*In The Name of Allah, The Most Compassionate, The Most Merciful*

Peace be on our Prophet who was sent as mercy for Mankind, the Master of all creatures and Messengers, Abi Al Qassem Mohammad and his pure and chaste Household.

*Since the very beginning, when the Prophet of Mercy - Al Mustafa Al Amjad (Peace be upon him and his Household) - made public the call for Islam - the religion of righteousness and guidance - following the orders of his Lord who armed him with the honor and power of faith and made him high hold the banner of jihad to raise the word of Allah Al Mighty on Earth, Allah forcefully and decisively supported his steps towards the predestined goal which is achieving victory over the enemies of Allah and humanity and establishing the pillars of Islam and its colossal edifice. This is made clear by the noble Ayah: {It is He who has sent His Messenger with guidance and the religion of truth to manifest it over all religion, although they who associate others with Allah dislike it}.*

Following the victorious conquer of Holy Mecca, people started embracing Islam in groups; no soon did Islam grow strong and mighty. Tribes, peoples, and states - known historically for their might and tyranny - fully accepted Islam. It was also greatly welcomed by many peoples from around the world who found in it a savor from the yoke of oppression and servitude. All evidences and given that depend in their conclusions on the strong-woven doctrine of Islam, the vitality of its codes and regulations, the strength of its influence on the souls, and its capability to polarize give the impression and enforce the conviction that the religion of Islam must have manifested itself more over the various prevalent doctrines, religions, and social systems. It must be more spread among peoples and places, and it must have a more positive influence and presence in all the general domains and the courses of global events and civilized developments. However, the faithful believers have drunk the bitter glass of sorrows since the early ages - with the emergence of dangerous perversities that led to preventing the people of righteousness and the proper method from occupying the positions Allah had entitled them to - meaning the leadership of Muslims. The bitter taste remained the drink of the following generations over the consecutive ages and the successive rules of perverse leaders except for few. These leaders had many a time exploited the power they usurped for worldly profits and interests for themselves and for their followers and men; perversions were deeper, and weakness and feebleness spread in the body of the nation and the countries of Muslims leading to this state of great degeneration which was exploited by the enemies who were seeking the opportunity to tear the nation apart and tighten their control on it. Nevertheless, the elements of strength in Islam are perpetual, and they are represented in its tolerant doctrine and the biography of its faithful men and in the brilliant, intellectual, scientific, and cultural achievements made by Muslim scholars that have imposed themselves even on the western

controllers becoming among the pillars of their modern scientific and intellectual renaissance. In fact, many fair western scholars and men of intellect have acknowledged that; furthermore, some well known westerners have expressed their great admiration of Islam and its Prophet (Peace be upon him and his Household) as well as its regulations and codes which - in their view - address all the crises and negative aspects of the western civilization.

Thanks to the contributions of these men of intellect and the efforts of the activists and callers in Islamic communities in western and other countries, a procession of conversion to Islam started marching with quick accelerating steps surpassing all obstacles represented first in the deep influences of the materialistic western civilization that glorifies religious dissolution and sanctifies immoral conduct in the name of individual freedom, and second, in the incessant media, cultural, and political campaigns that aim at distorting the image of Islam and Muslims with the goal of besieging the phenomenon of conversion to Islam that is growing in the West.

Still, western countries and cities witness on daily basis the conversion of many men and women of various religious and intellectual origins and diversified cultural and social classes to Islam who by declaring their Islam wrap their voyage of discovering the true religion that satisfies their minds and soothes their souls. They find in the doctrine of Islam the convincing answers to their questions on the existence and The Creator and the relation of man with Him that harmonizes with the sound human instinct. They also seek and find in it factual solutions for many social, psychological, and spiritual troubles that western societies suffer from.

Figures speak about the great number of these converts to Islam. In some countries, they are tens of thousands; in others, they are hundreds of thousands; and in one of the major countries their number has become over one million. Most of these converts perform their religious duties with great enthusiasm and much care, and many of them have become callers who mastered the language of communication with their environment and societies making great influence and considerably enriching the presence of Muslims and Islam in their countries.

To shed light on this valuable international Islamic phenomenon that asserts the integrity of this religion and its brilliant presence in all squares while equally highlighting the persistence of the divine promise of the manifestation of Islam on all religions and doctrines when Allah Al Mighty permits Imam Mahdi, His great Caliph on Earth, to achieve this complete and absolute manifestation, and with the sake of introducing vital and real samples of these brothers and sisters who accepted the religion of Allah with content and conviction, the Islamic cultural magazine, Noor Al Islam , which is issued by Imam Hussein Foundation in Beirut since 1988 up till now, insists in specifying in each of its issues an article entitled **«Welcome to Islam»** in which it presents a special interview or the story of one of these new men or women who were guided to Islam in the various countries and

continents. The new convert would introduce us to his identity, environment, and religious and intellectual background and talk about the reasons and circumstances that led him to the new religion and his experience in his quest for the facts latent in it and which drew him to be convinced and actually to embrace Islam. Mostly, he would mention the difficulties he faced in his path and how he controlled them while trusting in Allah Al Mighty. Then he would talk about his contribution to the call to Islam in his environment while giving his viewpoint and remarks to this effect.

To spread the benefit and in response to the hopes of some brethrens working in the domain of the call to Islam (May Allah support them), Imam Hussain Foundation had decided to gather these richly emotional interviews and stories and present them in a way that facilitates reading them all to fill with joy the hearts of these who are happy with seeing the guidance of Islam and its brilliant light that radiates everywhere. It also aids the heart of everyone who aches when seeing these falling in the abyss of corruption and perversion, for these new converts who come to the bosom of Islam and faith willingly and consciously from antagonistic or opposite backgrounds are strong evidences on corrupt Muslims. Perhaps the stories of the former would be a moral to the latter that would awaken their consciences and enlighten their hearts.

*Allah's content is all what we seek, and Him we seek for assistance.*

**Imam Hussain Foundation**

## Christian comes home to Islam

**Ahmad Hassan Holt**

**Brother Ahmad Hassan Holt, a British Muslim, wrote his touching story exclusively for «Noor Al-Islam».**

As days passed into weeks John's visits to the village became more and more frequent. He came to know almost everyone from grandparents to grandchildren, becoming a 'family member' to so many families. (Unknowingly, he was being guided and taught by the best of teachers.) Although from a western society, John somehow or other found no difficulty in fitting into Arab society. Everything came naturally, just as though he were a native Arab, and although his purpose in journeying to the land had been to help the Israelis, he became more and more aware that there was another purpose, a much deeper reason... but what?

One Friday (Sabbath) evening John was walking with Shmuel, a Jewish friend, around the perimeter of the Kibbutz. As they came to the eastern side, the twinkling lights of Arab villages on the hills of Western Galilee looked very pretty against the darkness of the hills. One area of lights, much larger than the others, aroused John's attention. Turning to Shmuel, he asked: «*What is that big village over there?*» Shmuel replied: «*That is village Tamra. They are all Muslims. They are a bad lot causing many problems for Israel. They shelter P.L.O. terrorists, fly the Palestinian flag, and cause strikes. You can never trust them - they steal from our lands and take bicycles and things from our homes. Never go there, keep well away from them.*»

Some days later, while John was working in the kitchen of the communal dining hall, he noticed a stranger who was retiling the walls of the boiler room. As John passed by, the 'stranger' turned, and their eyes met and held for a brief second. But no words were spoken. At about 2.30 p.m. John, whose shift had ended for the day, was making his way down the steps of the main entrance with the thought of a few hours sleep. Sitting on the bottom step was a young man who turned with outstretched hand - it was the stranger. As their hands clasped, the young man asked: «*You will come home with me now to my village?*» «*What village is that?*», asked John. «*I live in Village Tamra*», replied the young man. John's reply was instant: «*Thanks, I'll be happy to come*», and together they set off for Tamra, a 'village' of 18,000 people - all of them Muslims.

Adil and John became close friends - brothers. Village Tamra opened wide its doors. Unbreakable bonds of love were forged as John spent more and more of his time in this warm-hearted village that was only 1½ hours walk across the fields from the Kibbutz. The villagers took him to their hearts, and he soon became involved in the village life. He would visit the High School, and on one occasion, the English teacher invited him to take the lessons, to the delight of the students - and indeed himself. He was often in demand to visit the homes of students to 'help with their English'. John's heart was deeply moved with emotion as he realized that their purpose in inviting him was not because they needed tuition in English (most of them being word-perfect already) but because of their love toward him. He was



often invited to engagement and wedding receptions, staying overnight with Adil's family, or sometimes with others.

John, through experience, knew the route through the fields to the Kibbutz and would sometimes depart from Tamra at around midnight. He enjoyed walking in the brilliant moonlight and the silent stillness of the night. He would often be given to deep thought, and he experienced the feeling that he was somehow or other related to the soil, the rocks, and trees, and he also experienced closeness - that he was not in fact alone.

One night, however, as he left village, he realized that there is no moon. But because of having walked many times, he did not feel unduly concerned being sure he would find the way. After about an hour, he became aware of the sound of horse hooves in the distance, and then he realized that the sound was getting rapidly louder. Suddenly the shape of a horse and rider loomed directly in his path. A voice cried out: *«Who are you? What are you doing here at this hour?»* The voice sounded cold and angry. In reply John explained that he was returning to Kibbutz Afek after visiting his brothers in Tamra. *«What family did you visit?»* questioned the voice. The name of the family had hardly left John's lips before the young man jumped from the horse. He came close and pleaded *«Oh English brother, please forgive me, we know about this English brother that loves us»*. The two embraced. The young man's voice now filled with warmth and pleasure as he explained: *«Sometimes people come in the night and steal from us. They take our sheep, so when the dogs become restless and growl we must investigate.»* (By this time two more young brothers had arrived.) The young men were from a Bedouin family camped some distance away. After some discussion, the young men invited John to return with them to their home. But because of the time - about 1, 30 a.m. - it was not possible. With understanding the young men suggested *«Insha'Allah you will visit us on another occasion»*. Then they told John *«Our brother, you are walking along the wrong path. We will show you the right path»* So it was that those young Muslim Bedouin brothers guided his steps along the path that took him to Afek. In the darkness, John had become lost and was travelling in the wrong direction.

Visiting village Jedeida with a brother for the first time, John was invited to the family home, and as is the custom, he was taken to meet the head of the family. As they entered the room, a tall distinguished figure rose to greet them. Suddenly he paused, his eyes holding John's with a burning intensity. It seemed to John that his eyes could see into the depth of his being. Then this dear one stepped forward and took John into his arms, and with tears in his eyes gave thanks to Allah for bringing home this son to his people. And again John was overcome with emotion.

This dear soul was 109 years of age. Knowing John's reason for coming to this land and his former attitude towards the Arabs - the Muslims - he could somehow see something within John's heart of which he himself was still unaware.

One day brother Adil questioned: *«Brother John! Would you like to marry a Muslim woman? We know a good woman who would like to marry you.»* John replied: *«Why do you ask this of me, oh my brother, when you*

*know that it is not possible for a non-Muslim to marry a Muslim woman?» Adil translated this to the family gathering, and there was laughter. «Why are you laughing?» questioned John. «Because we know you» answered Adil. «All the village knows you, there are no problems. We will make a home for you and find you a job because you belong to us.»*

Soon the news that John might marry among the Arabs reached the Kibbutz, becoming a topic for local gossip. Hostility from a number of Jewish ‘friends’ became obvious, soon to be followed by a visit from the Security Police, when John was questioned at length concerning his relationship with ‘the Arabs’. Eventually he was asked to leave the country. (Before his relationship with the Arabs, he had been invited to consider becoming a permanent member of the Kibbutz).

### THE END OF THE BEGINNING

The memories of those few days spent visiting many loved ones in various villages are forever fresh in my mind, so too is the heartbreak and pain of parting from loved ones, whose love and kisses are forever fresh. I hear again and again their cries: *«You cannot leave us, our brother, you are from us.»*

As the plane climbed up into the blue sky, I pleaded *«Oh God, please do not let this be the end!»* At that moment in time I did not know that in fact it was an end - but only the end of the beginning.

When I arrived back in Britain - the land of my birth - I felt *«This is a foreign country»*. I longed for my people - the Palestinian Arabs. Eventually I joined an organization, C.A.A.B.U. (The Council for the Advancement of Arab-British Understanding) and would often attend meetings in London and other cities and towns, enjoying meeting Arabs from many countries. One day when visiting one of the Arab embassies in St. James Square in London, a brother presented me with two parcels, one containing the Holy Quran, and the other a prayer rug. Strangely perhaps for a Christian, I received them with pleasure. Other brothers presented books about Islam from time to time, and I was invited to become a member of an Islamic society based in Tripoli, attending seminars and meetings in their name.

Although not a Muslim (at least not knowingly) I found contentment of heart among Muslims.

Having received an invitation to attend a seminar in Nottingham, I journeyed to London because a coach was due to depart from Central Mosque, Regents Park, taking delegates to the conference.

This was my first visit to the mosque, and while there I developed a conversation with a brother from Iraq - a professor from Baghdad University. As we were talking together, the ADHAN was called for midday prayer. The brother suggested that we should go into the prayer hall. Oh what could I do? What should I do? I did not know how to pray and felt shy to inform him of such. Then the thought came: *«Go with him; follow him»*.

### THE SHAHADA

Entering the prayer hall in the company of many ‘brothers’ filled me with warmth. A hitherto unknown feeling of well being came upon me, and as I recited the ‘SHAHADA’ I felt myself lifted up, as something I had been

taught to fear - 'the Sword of Islam' - struck deep into my heart, and golden moments spent among my beloved Palestinians flashed across my mind: «*Please kiss me good night*»; «We love you, all our village loves you»; «*Would you marry a Muslim woman, there would be no problem, we know you*»; «*Thanks but to Allah for bringing this son home to his people*».

### **A SHOCK, BUT...**

In April 1986, I was a guest of some Libyan brothers in Tripoli, experiencing the American bombing and aggression on innocent men, women and children. Consequently, because of my anger and disgust at the British Government's involvement, I was interviewed by the local radio and news papers which carried accounts of my experiences. One week later, I was called to the office of the director of the company by whom I was employed. Mr. Joseph (Jewish) made no secret of the reason for dismissing me - on the grounds that I was now a liability to the company; his comments to the media were somewhat different. And so for the first time in 48 years I was sacked. It was a shattering experience - a punishment - or so I thought. But the year of unemployment was in fact a blessing, because one day, out of the blue, I was given the opportunity to come to London to work for Iraqi brothers in property redevelopment.

### **The Oneness of Allah (Tawheed)**

These dear brothers, although Muslims, are of the Shia faith, and again my heart and mind were being enriched, my eyes opened even wider as I began to meet brothers not only from Iraq but also from Iran, and other Islamic countries; the bonds of brotherhood bringing me close to Sunni and Shia' alike, with deep and sincere love for both.

Thanks be to Allah for His bounteous blessing. I cannot differentiate, because I know that there is only one Islam - all Muslims are brothers and sisters, only evil men promote division. Allah (SWT) tells us in the Holy Quran: «*Hold fast together to the covenant of Allah and be not disunited; this is better for you*».

May Allah (SWT) inspire our hearts towards true unity, and guide us together along the right path, giving us strength enough to strive to follow the example of His Prophet (P.B.U.H.)

## THE SPANISH SISTER MARY SALVADOR

IMAN BASHIR

*«I faced many problems in my life, but they all disappeared gradually after Islam».*

*«Islam gave the women their full rights in contrast with the Western Civilization».*

The Spanish sister who was born for Christian family in Barcelona, Spain, a beautiful city on the Mediterranean, is yet another witness to testify for the fact that Islam is the religion of the Divine innate nature. When the minds receive its facts and when the hearts are struck by its light, they will be attracted to it, regardless of all obstacles and difficulties.

Although sister Iman was only eighteen years old and although she is a true daughter of the Western materialistic civilization that lures girls at her age to let themselves be driven by the swaying tide... In spite of all this, she answered the Divine call in a moment of contemplation and emancipation... And here she is now, thanking Allah, the All-Mighty, for His Grace of guidance to Islam. She thus became, through her commitment to Islam, another sound evidence against her own environment, as well as against Muslim girls and women who have deviated from the path of Islam having been deceived by the sparkling Western Civilization.

We met her along with her husband Dr. Muhammad Bashir in their Southern Suburb house (Beirut) and had the following interview.

**Q: We would like you to tell us in the beginning about yourself and your life before you embraced Islam?**

A: I came from Spain, where I was born and raised in the famous city of Barcelona. We were a small family of three children, in addition to our parents, and our social life was quite ordinary.

As for our religion, it is true that we belonged socially to the Christian community, but, much like most of the other families, we did not care much about its instructions. For, as you know, there is no real interest in Europe in religion generally, except for certain formalities and appearances.

**Q: What was your family's, and your social environment in general, idea about Islam?**

A: Although Spain was an Islamic country for a number of centuries, we heard nothing of this historical era. This is due, of course, to a deliberate attempt to ignore and by-pass this history. We were totally surprised when we learned about Islam with its Divine Shari'a. For the prevailing idea about Islam in our environment was that of a religion that does not command any interest in, being a backward religion whose followers are mainly primitive and backward; a religion of terrorism and fanaticism.

**Q: Didn't the academic curriculum talk about the Islamic Religion?**

A: Not at all. None of our schools showed any signs of concern to even mention this religion; let alone talking about it in detail.

But this is all behind us now. As a result to the new spread of Islam among us, schools began to provide detailed notions about Islam, its customs and its traditions.

**Q: How did you learn about Islam? And what were the reasons that made you embrace it?**

A: In the beginning, I had a very strong relationship that bounded me in friendship with a number of young Spanish men and women who, like me, were Christians by name only.

Then I began to notice certain changes in their behavior and thinking patterns. I was quite surprised, but I learnt later that it was because they have embraced Islam. I was quite shocked especially when I saw some of my female friends wearing the veil. I started to ask a lot of questions, demanding to know why they were doing this, and what the use of wearing a veil was. They only told me that I should do the same thing and learn about the Islamic Religion from those who are Muslims. They kept on trying to persuade me, until finally I agreed with them and started to go to the Islamic Ahl El-Beit Center in Barcelona. At the Center, I began to listen to some of the brothers who were explaining the basic Islamic principles and concepts and holding discussions about Islam. I was especially attracted to the Holy Quran and started to read a Spanish translation of its meanings. Gradually, I began to like to go to the Center as much as possible to attend the Islamic lectures. A new light was invading my heart and occupying my soul. A feeling of relief and tranquility was engulfing me, and I grew very happy with my new experience.

Yet, I was also experiencing a conflicting struggle between my love for the Islamic Religion, and the fear of having to confront my parents and my society. I was both afraid and happy at the same time. But it was hard for me to declare my Islam in the open, and I ended by deciding to adopt Islam secretly, without telling my parents. Nevertheless, my commitment to refrain from eating unlawful meat aroused their curiosity. In response to my mother's inquiry, I merely claimed that I do not feel like it... Thus, my parents were left wary and surprised of my illogical behavior.

But after a short period, I was no longer able to conceal my embracement of Islam for many practical reasons that have to do with praying and ablution. I confided to my parents saying that I adopted Islam. But that did not mean much to them in the beginning, being totally ignorant of what Islam is and what being a Muslim involves. But later on, we went through a period of turmoil; they were against my Islam, and they objected in particular against my veil, which they considered equivalent to renouncing civility.

At that time, I met my husband, Dr. Muhammad Bashir, at the Islamic Center, where he used to lecture in Islamic jurisprudence, reciting the Holy Quran and Arabic language. But our relationship was quite ordinary to the extent that I was surprised when he asked me for marriage, although he was still a student of medicine.

But my parents who knew what kind of a man my husband to-be was were in favor of our engagement. Of course, all these developments came after my parents were used to my becoming a Muslim and began to accept it as a matter of fact. This provided a comfortable situation that enabled me to practice my Islamic obligations as they ought to be practiced. Then when my husband graduated we moved to Lebanon to stay there for good.

**Q: As a Christian, what was particularly capturing in Islam?**

A: The absolutely Divine spiritualism; the clarity and simplicity in its concepts; and its realistic approach in its jurisprudence. These are things I have never encountered before Islam.

Prayers, too, with its connotations as a means of communicating with Allah without any mediators, have touched my heart and made me understand the meaning and the necessity of religion. I used to compare all this with what I used to do when I went to church as a child. The priest used to ask us to confess our sins. What sins could an eight-year-old commit? Why should we, assuming we had committed any, confess to this man? The horror that used to fill our hearts in these occasions has swayed us away from this religion.

**Q: Who is the Islamic personality that impressed you?**

A: I was impressed by all the faithful and great Islamic personalities: Starting by the Greatest Prophet (P.B.U.H.), Fatima Al-Zahra (A.S.) and Imam Ali (A.S.) to all the members of Ahl El-Beit (A.S.) and the Prophet's companions. Each and every one of them played a great role in serving Islam especially Fatima Al-Zahra (A.S.) who played a great role as a woman. I was also deeply affected by the tragedy of Karbala - Imam Hussein's revolution. It occupied a central spot in my heart, and intensified my loyalty and attachment to this religion and especially to Ahl El-Beit and their great martyr, Imam Hussein (A.S.), who sacrificed his life for the cause of Islam.

**Q: To what extent did you enjoy a feeling of peace and tranquility after Islam?**

A: I faced a lot of problems but they all began to gradually disappear, when I came to know Islam and acquired the ability to surrender to Allah's will and wisdom.

**Q: On another level, having noticed the relations Muslims develop among themselves in comparison with the Western social relations; what can you say about it?**

A: I have noticed a big difference, and especially with respect to women. The Western view of the women entails a lot of discrimination and a certain amount of ignorance to her role as a human being. The looks are the only thing that matters, such an inhuman view has caused frustration and depression to the majority of Western women. Islam, on the other hand, had given women their full rights at all levels, being a religion that appreciates and respects women and equates among them. It also gives them a well studied and logical degree of freedom.

**Q: In the light of your experience, what is the best way a caller should pursue in the West?**

A: He should, first of all, always keep in his mind the difficulty of the task he is committed to as a result of the vicious war of rumors and propaganda that is waged in the information media that builds a concrete

wall between Islam and the Western people. If he wishes to be successful, he has to be armed with patience and wisdom. He also has to understand the mentality of the Western people so that he could choose the right introduction that ensures good results. In addition, cultural Islamic centers should be instituted in all foreign countries that help in introducing the people to Islam.

**Q: How do you evaluate the Muslim women's position today?**

A: The woman is an essential cornerstone in the Islamic society. She is the basis of a good home and a good society for she is the one that holds the responsibility of upbringing the children in the best possible way and spreading a healthy Islamic atmosphere in her house that would immunize them against the counter currents.

I also believe that the Muslim women have become well aware of this educational Islamic role that falls upon their shoulders. On the other hand, it is regretful that many Muslim women have been deceived by the corrupted and corrupting Western civilization, to the extent that they are imitating the Western women in everything. This calls upon all of us to double our efforts to bring them back to the path of Islam.

**Q: Any last word you like to say?**

A: I ask Allah, the All-Mighty, to open the minds and hearts of the people here and there to the religion of Islam, since it is the only road that enables humanity to overcome its difficulties both in this life and in the hereafter.

I would also like to call upon the workers for the cause of Islam to double their efforts and to adhere always to Islamic unity and brotherhood.



## THE ENGLISH GUIDED SISTER

### KHADIJA

*«I studied all religions... and I examined all ideas... but I did not find any logical responses that could be accepted by the mind except in Islam... When I got hold of this truth, I adopted it and felt proud to acknowledge it in public».*

...There she comes, a sparrow from the West, exactly on time... wearing her gown and her purity... looking taller and more graceful than those Eastern women who have lost their identities and dreamt of the West.

She is as young as a flower... not more than twenty years... Yet she is able to carry 14 centuries in her heart and mind... She comes out of the ranks of our incompetence and indifference and out of the ranks of their defeated culture... She comes to us from the heartland of the British, raising her fist against atheism and going astray... A witness of the Islamic upheaval that began to crack the land they stand on... We did not know where to start from ... and decided to leave it to her.

### This is how I realized the truth

Like most members of my generation, I grew up in a Christian family who decided to do without religion.

Thus my parents raised me on the basis of having nothing to do with religion to the extent that I always thought that God existed for the sake of others only.

Such a climate and an upbringing generated a deep desire inside me to search for the truth. Such a desire to seek knowledge was so strong that although my parents were by that time divorced, I found it impossible to keep all my emotions and questions to myself. I wrote a long letter to my father telling him about all what was boiling inside me in the hope that he would have the time to read it and come to my help. I waited for a long time, but alas there was no reply whatsoever. Perhaps it was because the issue of religion did not matter to him at all.

On the other hand, my mother was preoccupied with her friends and relations that she could not have noticed what I was going through, or how much I was affected by the need to answer these questions. I was beginning to search for the «*Right*», the origin of life, the meaning and aim of life, the existence of one god who governs this life...etc I studied all religions and examined all ideas, but I did not find what I was looking for, since these religions did not offer any logical answers that could be readily accepted by man's mind or his innate nature ... except Islam. When I realized the truth I adopted it and was proud to acknowledge it in public... But this meant waging an all out war against me by all who were around me, whether my parents, my friends or my colleagues at work in the headquarters of one of the biggest national companies.

### Confrontation... Steadfastness and Success

This war was all the more intensified because Allah has commanded us to believe in all what has been written in The Book, and not just what suits our conceptions and inclinations. Consequently, once I became a Muslim, I wore the veil, only to be faced by all sorts of mockery and sarcasm.



My father was the first to be shocked by this transformation; and he was so embarrassed by my new outlook, that he tried to prevent me from taking the path of my choice in every possible way, but he failed, and he had to admit in the end that I refused to be one of the «hypocrites», and that I was making all possible efforts to change my life in accordance with the Islamic teachings and conceptions. In the end, he had to give in and accept me as I was... He even became convinced that Islam is something different than the behavior and thoughts of many Muslims, and even though he did not believe in God, he began to admire Islam and started to stand up to anybody who would criticize me.

As for my mother who was always preoccupied, she wished nevertheless that I would adopt any European religion for she knew that I was going to face many difficulties and obstacles.

On the other hand, my colleagues at work and my friends in general advised me to leave Britain for good and to go to any other country where I was to change my worship and my attitudes, and may be I could then come back to my senses.

They were driven by their wrong conceptions about Islam and Muslims to the extent that they treated me (having put on the veil) as somebody who has come straight from the Middle Ages. I used to sense that they were making fun of me, but this only made me pray to God to give me strength and consistence in my faith. Allah, the Most Exalted, bestowed His grace on me and many people began to change their attitude towards me, and even towards Islam as well... They all became less acute and less fanatic. The strangest thing that happened to me throughout my experience of wearing the veil was that I gained a lot of respect in general and among men in particular.

Moreover, we should always show respect and sympathy at all times and try to avoid the things that make people turn away from us such as anger, slander, hatred and revenge... We should also share with others, even if by a nice word or an advice, their problems and provide them with any kind of help we can. We should not be affected in our behavior and conceptions by the influence of our individual or national habits or any other cultural heritages. The only source and reference should be the Quran and the Prophet's Sunna.

One more thing, we should take care of our Muslim children, who should be brought up on the ideals, percepts, and teachings of Islam, to ensure the strength of our Muslim society; a strength that is based on the unity and cohesion of the Muslim family.

**Q: Since you mentioned the Muslim family, what in your view is the role of Muslim women?**

A: The great prophetic teaching that sets Heaven under the feet of mothers has always been my guide. The greatest and most important role a woman can play is bringing up new generations and teaching them the right path of Islam so that they can establish an Islamic state and a great Islamic civilization... Therefore, a woman should be educated just as a man... for she has to set the good example for her children. Furthermore, she would have

to provide her children with all the correct answers to all their questions... Women would have to be patient and rest assured that Allah, the All-Mighty, is aware of their work, and He bears witness to their sacrifices.

On the other hand, Muslim sisters should always meet together to promote the spirit of fraternity among them. They should also be fair in their treatment of their children and refrain from any act of discrimination between their sons and daughters. They should always be wise, responsible, and prudent for they are performing their duty towards Allah, their husbands, and their children.

Let me end by saying that my long suffering has ended when I realized the greatness of this religion, and I believe, therefore, that guiding the people to Islam is a great responsibility we are entrusted with... Islam is the true gift Allah has given us; let us share His gift with the others.

### **Let Us Call for Islam by Our Islamic Practice and not by Lecturing**

We have to follow the example of the prophets and messengers, who did not call for Allah by words only, but they also practiced Islam in their struggle and patience until Allah's word was the highest. Their daily practices and actions were always in full agreement with what they called for. Let us take the veil as an example. If the Muslim woman wore the veil but did not commit herself to abide by the other Islamic duties Islam has ordained on women, she would be rightly blamed by the unbelievers... We have to bear our responsibilities, and we ask Allah to give us the strength to consolidate our faith.

### **Q: In view of the reaction of the society you live in towards your belief in Islam, it leads us to the question: How should Islam be introduced to the West?**

A: We are living now in an age of rapid change and incredible technological advancement in all fields. In such an age, many people in the West do not contemplate the idea of the existence of one god who governs this universe...

Thus, they live in a terrible and horrifying spiritual vacuum and satisfy their physical needs only. Allah the All-Mighty says in Verse 44 of the Bakara Surrah: *«Would you enjoin righteousness on others and forget yourselves? Yet you read the scriptures. Have you no sense?»*. I stress on what I have said before, and I will never feel tired of repeating it. We should turn what we call for into a daily practice.

If we do good and become faithful in our belief and loyalty to Allah the All-Mighty, our call would find its way to the hearts of the people in the West. We have to show them the tolerance and simplicity of our great religion and how happy we are in adopting it as our guide that teaches us piety and kindness... Lastly, we have to introduce Islam in a language that they understand and accept.

## STEVE JOHNSON

(FAROOK ABDULLAH)

The History Professor in Indiana State University Declares After Embracing Islam:

O, Messenger of Allah; O, my master; Peace be upon you: Your voice has transcended the barriers of time, and it has reached us sweet and clear after 14 centuries. I can almost visualize you sitting with your companions when you said: *«I long to see my brothers»*. Astonished, the companions (A.S.) would ask: *«Are not we your brothers, Messenger of Allah?»*.

And then you would answer: *«You are my companions... My brothers are the ones who would come later. They would believe in me without seeing me... Each one of them would be rewarded 50 times as much as you»*. And then he would reassert, in response to your inquiry: *«They will be rewarded 50 times as much as any of you, because you find others to help you in your path of doing good while they would not»*.

Here, O Messenger of Allah (P.B.U.H.), is one of those we believe is one of your brothers... He lived in a different time of different values, where good in his country has no followers, and where he could not seek help except for evil... But he is reborn anew, with his pure faith, and he is longing to be one of your followers... He is Steve Johnson, the history professor in the University of Indiana - Muslim who professes that there is no god but Allah, and that Muhammad (P.B.U.H.) is His Messenger... In the following we will let him tell his own story, the story of Farook Abdullah as he now calls himself:

*«Islam Is Undoubtedly 'the Right Path'... And The Quran Is the Way to know It»*.

One of my earliest memories is that I used to sit under a big tree in my father's ranch looking towards the clouds. One idea used to persist whenever I sat there: There must be a strong powerful God who runs this universe ... Since then I grew determined to live for the cause of this God. During the following 22 years, my life had undergone a series of transformations that drew me gradually closer and closer to Islam... I was a hardworking student, and I used to spend most of my spare time in studying... I was eager to know everything ... My unsocial nature and love of solitude were quite helpful. .. I spent long hours in reading... In the eighth grade, I was injured in a car accident as I was on my way to attend my grandmother's funeral... In a few seconds, my whole life changed... I lied in my hospital bed unable to move. My head was hit... I could not feel anything in the left side of my body. I also lost the sense of hearing in my right ear...

Upon my hospital bed, a man on a cross was hung on the wall... who according to my Christian Catholic belief was God... I believed then that he loves me and would relief me of my pains... I prayed to him and promised that I would dedicate all my life to him.

This accident deprived me of the ability to practice any physical activity which made me devote even more time to reading and studying.

I knew that the church does not allow priests to marry, but I believed that such a sacrifice was necessary for the purpose of serving God... Meanwhile

the church needed doctors, and thus I enrolled in the university to study chemistry and psychology as a prelude to study medicine... I worked hard and was the first in rank even in the first year...

I divided my time between my academic-scientific studies and my passion for philosophy and theology... Gradually, I began to lose interest in becoming a physician but I was accepted in the school of medicine which was, as I thought, a sign from God that I ought to continue, and so I did.

In the following years, I had little time for philosophy, because, as you know, studying the various branches of medicine is quite demanding. Nevertheless, I used to spend a few hours everyday in praying and contemplating... I also had to serve in the local church... Yet a strong feeling of anxiety and frustration was gradually getting hold of me... I started to have doubts regarding my faith and began to hate my studies...

This led me to taking drugs and alcohol. .. I did not want to feel anything or think about anything. I began to take pills and wine the moment I woke up in the morning, and my religion failed to help me... Then one day I decided to leave the university and told the church that I wanted to dedicate myself for serving the church and studying philosophy.

I was hoping that philosophy would help me to believe in what religion says about God being human, and that all humans are sinners from the moment they are born.

I used to spend my days fasting from uttering any word and praying all the time for God to make me one of his saints. But I did not eliminate my drug and alcohol addiction. The church asked me to determine which theological school I wanted to work in. I went to Europe to find some help. I came back, deciding, as Rome wished, that I should go to Toronto. But in the end, I was sent to the Indiana University to study for a degree in philosophy, Theology, and education.

But in Indiana, I felt suddenly that my soul was completely void...

I started by being spiritually destroyed, and decided to join the church; then I wanted to study so that I could believe, but I ended in believing in nothing.

One night I was tempted, and for two years I was sinking in the depth of desperation and uncertainty... What was even worse is that I began to be offered academic awards and to hold honorable university degrees, such as the doctor's degree of the John Hopkins University... But I did not feel the value of any of these. On the contrary, I felt that my sins were being rewarded... I began to despise myself and believe that I was a hypocrite. Then Allah's grace made me meet a young man from Abu Dhabi called Ismail. We talked and explained some of the notions of Islam... I decided to visit the mosque on the following day. Then I took a vacation, and we went together to Denver, Colorado. We became friends and roommates. Since he knew the basis of the Islamic call, he never asked me all that period to embrace Islam. But he used to pray when the time of prayers was due, and whenever I asked him about Islam, he used to answer my specific question only.

In 1981, I joined a seminar to study Sufism. It ended by making me hate Islam although I had a great admiration for it. Three months later, Ismail

gave me a book that contained certain sacred traditions... Reading it, I knew that I was mistaken... I began to tremble and felt cold; Ismail covered me with blankets but to no avail. I was shaking... What I read has struck my deepest soul and touched my spirit which was struck by its beauty, strength and truth... I knew that I have found the truth I was looking for... But I was still terrified... And I was unable to sleep or eat... Little by little the trembling began to weaken, but I was still feeling cold... As if I was hearing a bell that kept ringing these sacred traditions.

In November 1981, I professed the two testimonies: that there is no god but Allah and that Muhammad is His Messenger, and I felt a profound inner peace.

For the few next months, my soul was transcending higher and higher ...and gaining more and more peace and tranquility while I was living the sublimity of prayers and Islamic brotherhood.

I became certain that Islam is the right path. It was a gift from Allah, the All-Mighty, that nobody ought to lose.

I decided, then, and in accordance with Allah's will, to surrender myself to God, whatever the circumstances... I dedicated myself for the call in the United States... Such a call has its bitter moments and sweet ones. I began to be frustrated by some of the brothers and sisters who were unwilling to sacrifice for the sake of the call which ought to be coupled by the feeling of subjection to the will of Allah, The Most Exalted.

I was also frustrated by those who lacked a clear vision and the will to promote the programs of the call which could present Islam to the entire American people, who although they might appear strong are in reality longing for what could determine the meaning of their lives.

Moreover, I was even more frustrated by my own incompetence and ignorance...

On the other hand, I was happy for all those who were seeking to find truth and who were finding it in the end in our straight path religion - the beautiful Islam... At such moments I used to feel that all my frustrations disappeared and evaporated.

And now when I go back in my memory to the days I was in my father's ranch... I thank Allah, The Most Exalted, for His grace and generosity... Whose kindness has led me to the truth that was inside me...? The truth of Islam and the truth of The Quran. May Allah be praised.

## THE GERMAN MUSLIM SISTER

### CATHERINE MAYERHOOVER

*- I felt an innate call telling me that the veil is better... But I did not do so to appease my husband but out of conviction and will.*

*- Islam brought me a sense of security and tranquility... I now have an aim to live and die for.*

The German sister Catherine Mayerhooover is one of thousands of Western women whom the corrupt and morally deteriorating civilization was unable to tempt. They embraced Islam and came to enjoy the happiness in this world and, Allah willing, in the Hereafter.

Noor Al-Islam met the German sister in the house she lives in with her husband Hisham Shamseddine in the village of Arabsalim in southern Lebanon which suffers, like all the southern villages, from the brutal aggression of the Zionists.

She answered our questions conveying a firm belief in Islamic rites and rulings.

**Q: We would like to express in the beginning our feelings of pride in meeting with sisters like you, and we ask you to introduce yourself and tell us about how you became a Muslim.**

A: I was born in 1968 in Stuttgart where I grew up and went to school until I graduated from high school. Then I met my Lebanese husband, and we were married in Germany.

As for my environment and the family's atmosphere, it was a relatively reserved Christian one. We all used to go to church on Sunday, and we had strong ties which used to bond us together with the rest of our relatives and especially my grandparents. But when they died things changed for the underlying motive was not being good to one's relatives, but rather to please my grandparents. And such a problem faces all the Western societies in general, where all emotional ties are severed once they lose their bonding element.

As for the larger environment, the role of religion with respect to the relations between individuals is quite formal and limited. Moreover, it has almost no role whatsoever in the issues of economy and education; whereas the issues of politics and nationalism play a major role whether in the German society or all Western ones.

**Q: Can you tell us about the direct and principal motives that made you adopt Islam?**

A: When I reached the age of 14, I no longer felt the need to go to church, for I had by that time reached the conclusion that what is considered to be the Bible is not realistic and could not be applied in our contemporary life. Then I began to feel that there is no role for the church and religion in the life of my generation. I stopped going to church, although I was not familiar with Islam and its Divine values. It was at this stage of emptiness that I met my husband who demanded that we should be married in accordance with the Islamic Shari'a, and I had to declare that there is no



God but Allah and that Muhammad is His messenger in front of a Sheikh. But I did not feel that I became a true Muslim.

After our marriage, we came to Lebanon to visit his family; I noticed that some women wore veils while the others did not. But the veiled women caught my attention more than the others. I felt as if I was asked by an inner call to wear a veil. Back in Germany and after a thorough study of many Islamic books, I wore the veil and began to practice all Islamic rituals especially the prayers. Yet my motive was never to please my husband and his family, but rather, it was based on a firm belief in Islam.

**Q: Would you describe your parents' attitude towards your becoming a Muslim and towards wearing the veil in particular?**

A: Their reaction was very harsh even before I wore the veil for I abandoned eating all non-Halal meat and drinking wine on social occasions. They could not understand my motives and felt personally offended.

Then when I wore the veil, they were practically shocked, especially my mother who threatened to stop talking to me if I did not back off. The following period was one of a conflict between my faith and my obligations towards my family. In the end, I took off the veil but remained committed to all the other Islamic teachings. Yet the innate call did not cease, and I had to live the same struggle all over for about a year. At the end of it I met a group of German Muslim women who wore veils. I admired their boldness and felt that I should do the same. But this time when my mother knew about it, she had to accept, for there was nothing that could make me change my mind.

**Q: How do you see the impact of Islam on your personality?**

A: On the personal level, I began to feel a blessed peace of mind and a feeling of relief and security.

This change was due to many reasons, the most important of which are:

**First:** My knowledge that there is a God Who created this universe and Who runs it in the most perfect manner. **Secondly:** I had a reason to live and die for and not just to spend my life trying to enjoy materialistic pleasures in this world like most of the individuals in Western societies.

There is also a big difference on the level of human relationships. Muslims are more human, respectful and caring in their relations with others, especially with their relatives and neighbors. They believe that all Muslims are equal and brothers and that they should help each other at the time of need.

**Q: In the light of your experience, can you suggest any new propositions regarding the methods of calling especially in the West?**

A: I believe that these methods should include translating important Islamic books and publishing Islamic magazines that should be spread among those who have not learned about Islam except what the Western media says. Moreover, I think that the best way to call for Islam is by

providing a good example. The people in the West look at what you do and not what you say.

**Q: What about the potentials for the Islamic Call in Germany?**

A: There are many ways one could call for Islam in Germany whether through the media or by holding seminars and exhibitions. We could also publish Islamic magazines that would reveal the truth of Islam and counteract the Western attack.

**Q: How would you describe the general state of Muslims on the international stage?**

A: Muslims are still subject to pressure and economic and political oppression in an effort to block out their development for the international society as a whole is aware of the strength and importance of Islam. But if Muslims do not seek to fight back both in theory and practice, Islam will not affect the peoples of Europe.

**Q: How do you evaluate the role of Muslim women in the light of what you have learnt about the position of women in Islam?**

A: Islam did not deny women their right to have a role in society and the right to learn and work. Moreover, Muslim women have been able to practice their role in an effective manner, and they were able to assert themselves in the society and demand respect and appreciation. But there are a lot of women who choose to honor social traditions that are sometimes contradictory with the Islamic principles, and this calls for an awareness campaign. In this respect, I value the work of certain woman callers who hold seminars to teach women their rights and their role in Islam and to keep them away from imitating Western women even if they were going astray.

**Q: Any final word you would like to convey through «Noor Al-Islam»?**

A: I would like to urge all Muslims to love one another and unite, for this is their major source of strength in the face of their enemies, and this strength would force the West to respect them and stop considering them as inferior. Unity is strength, and division is but weakness.



## The GERMAN SISTER

“**HALIMA KRAUSEN**”:

*«I learned about Islam and embraced it when I was a very young girl, and without talking to any Muslim.»*

Sister Halima was born in a very religious German family; her grandfather was a priest, and her uncle was a monk.

She learned about Islam and embraced it when she was only 13 years old, without even talking to any Muslim.

Halima is still interested in studying the Arabic language and teaching it. She is also devoted to studying Islamic sciences and calling for Islam.

The story of her embracing of Islam is unique and impressive. It also shows the impact Islam has on the pure souls when we go back to our innate nature and denounce blind imitation. That is why we decided to republish this interview courtesy of the « *Q News* » Magazine in London.

**Q: What made you decide at the age of just 13 to become a Muslim?**

A: The process was mostly connected with *Tawheed*, which is also taught in *Christianity* but it is connected with Jesus and the trinity. I did not think much about the trinity as a child but I thought and felt that there is one God Who created all human beings and that He must have revealed Himself to them in one form or another. Starting from the point that He is the Creator of all human beings, and that He is Just and Loving, it meant that He would give them all equal opportunities and not be connected with one people, the people of Israel, or one person only, Jesus Christ. My reading of other religions at an early age only strengthened this belief. I found in every religion truth and wisdom, and there were things I could not handle, which I thought I would be able to in the course of time. Islamic teaching, I later found out, confirmed all the previous revelations, highlighting the truth inherent in every religion. Islam also confirmed the concept of *Tawheed* without any compromise as my idea of love, justice and responsibility.

**Q: Did you know any Muslims at that time?**

A: I came into contact with Islam without Muslims. I got in touch with them after I had discovered Islam. There were not many Muslims then, mostly students at the university. Having accepted Islam, I wanted to know how to read the Quran; so I got someone to write the alphabet for me. The immigrant workers who came later had no more ideas about Islam than myself. But I got books written by orientalists, travelers, and novelists. They were like second hand information.

**Q: Since most orientalists tend to be negative about Islam, how did you see Islam?**

A: I must have had some vision, some guidance. Everything I found to be negative, I put it into «*deep freeze*», at the back of my mind, to sort out when I found more information.

**Q: How did your parents react to their 13-year-old daughter embracing another faith?**

A: When my mother read my diary, my parents tried to use the law to get me away from Islam. But they were told once you get 13 or 14, you are free to choose your own religion. So they asked the pastor and people like that to convert me - a challenge I accepted with pleasure. I liked discussions. It made me read more deeply into it. My parents must have been disappointed because it was not the result they desired.

**Q: How did Muslims react to you - a young girl embracing Islam?**

A: The immigrant workers accepted me straight away. As they did not have their families with them, they saw me as a little sister who needed protection. Though they were not themselves practicing Muslims, I felt very safe. They took great care to keep me out of the way of the «funny» people they met or anyone «unreliable». I used to leave my Islamic books with them because my parents thought they had done their duty if they kept me away from these books.

**Q: How did you gain knowledge about Islam without practicing Muslims around you?**

A: I tried to find out as much as possible, partly in reaction to what the pastor was telling me and partly because I was keen to learn myself. I wanted to read the Quran and make sense out of it. I memorized the letters of the Arabic alphabet, but I had nothing to read. A teacher of mine brought me a pocket-size Quran from Turkey. I got stuck because I did not know the vowel signs. Thanks to a transliteration of Surat Al-Fatiha in the Book, I was able to reconstruct the vowel sounds and learn to read. I memorized Surat Al-Fatiha, and the smaller Surahs at the end. Nobody ever checked me until I was 18 when I went to the mosque and heard the Imam and discovered my mistakes. I visited the library to read Arabic Grammar. At 17, I got a dictionary from which I learnt the roots of words which have a lot to do with the philosophy of the Arabic Language - that was in the late sixties. Praying too was learnt out of books; some said one thing and others another.

**Q: How did you know that what you were learning was right?**

A: For a long time I was not really sure what I was doing was right, but Allah accepts whenever you try your best. I knew I was making mistakes; there was nothing wrong with that since my intention was right. I got in touch with Muslims but not scholars. They were students from all over the world who knew more about Islam and practiced more than immigrant workers. As their knowledge was not much besides being mixed with their own ideas from home, I had different impressions of Islam. I had left home to do some office work training. Then I started to go to the mosque. They did not know very much only that which they had learnt at home, but they knew more than the immigrant workers. They practiced more than them, even if they practiced all kinds of things. But they also had their own ideas

from back home. So I had all these different impressions of Islam. I had access to a library with genuine books in English, including Yusuf Ali's translation of the Quran.

I also took part in discussions on Islam, because for three years I was the only one - a woman; often it was the Iman and me behind.

Whenever I did anything there was a general discussion: Should a woman do this or that? Should a woman drive a car or live away from her parents?

**Q: Did any one say to you: «Look, you just cannot do that» even when you knew you were right?**

A: Yes, but I did not really oppose it straight away except in discussions. I preferred to wait, for I was unsure about confronting somebody who might know better. In the beginning I had a complex, because I thought that Arabs had the advantage of having Arabic as their mother tongue, and they could understand The Quran. But soon I learned that this was not right. Even when I discerned I could do some of the things they said I could not, I did not waste my energy confronting them but waited until I got a little surer about my position.

**Q: What is the best way of reading the Quran?**

A: The Quran is an eternal revelation, not time bound. It reveals itself to everybody who tries to get close to it. The further you develop the more you understand it. You are not supposed to put it away on the top shelf. That is why it is unlike the Bible. The Quran is not just something you memorize for prayer, but something that has to be read regularly and something you try to get close to. It is like reading a letter that you got today. You open the letter and see what the person is telling you.

Sometimes it is something you feel very strange about, and you do not understand it straight away. Sometimes you have a problem, and you open it, and the solution is there. Even with other books this happens. Before I had any access to The Quran, I would go to the library, and in a book I had read many times before, I would find a passage from The Quran telling me what to do. For example, when I had to eat my mother's food while I was living at home, I was really desperate. I had no pocket money - not enough to buy my meals. I found that verse in the Quran where it says certain food is forbidden except if you are forced to eat it against your will and you do not eat too much of it; then it is not a sin. I found a solution! When my mother was not looking I would slip the meat to the dog.

**Q: How can women find out what the truth is when men with qualifications quote Hadiths which seem to put women down?**

A: One of the basic things that the Prophet (upon whom be peace) said - one of the neglected *Hadiths* - was what most Muslims know in theory and some do not even know that, is that, «*acquiring knowledge is a religious duty for every Muslim, man and woman*». If men have more knowledge, or seem to have more knowledge, women need to get more knowledge. The misery in the Islamic world is because the Muslims, especially the women

have not followed that *Hadith*. It is not a matter of waiting for a teacher or until I have time to study.

When I was teaching Arabic I used to tell my students to read three verses in the Quran every day. Some would say three?! No, that is not enough. But if you do that every day for one year, you can imagine how many verses you will read. Reading the translation and looking up the words in the dictionary, you would acquire a lot of knowledge, grammar and vocabulary.

## THE AMERICAN MUSLIM SISTER

**CINDY DAHER**

*I could not deny the logic, simplicity, and truth of the absolute Oneness of Allah and the teachings of Islam.*

Cindy married a Lebanese Muslim thirteen years ago, but not for any reason that has to do with Islamic principles. Later on, she was fortunate to meet somebody who enlightened her and opened her heart for the guidance of Islam. She became totally convinced after 6 years of debating and discussing.

Then this conviction grew even stronger when it changed to a strong belief and solid commitment that made her husband become committed himself, a phenomenon that has become common among many American Muslim women.

*Noor Al-Islam* interviewed Cindy while she was visiting her husband's relatives in Lebanon to tell us the story of her conversion to Islam as well as her wishes and inspirations as a Muslim who carries the mission to call for Islam in her heart and soul. She and her Muslim sisters remain an example and an evidence of what a Muslim is and should be especially to those women who have nothing left from their Islam except what is written in their identity cards.

**Q: Tell us about your childhood and your first religious life?**

A: I would like at first to welcome *Noor Al-Islam*, which I have read some issues of in Detroit, where I live, and came to value its role in promoting and spreading Islam.

I was born in the South American city of Shreveport, Louisiana. My parents divorced when I was four years old. A couple of years later my mother remarried a wonderful man, and a devout Christian (the son of a Baptist minister). I was taught to believe in the basic doctrines of Christianity including the trinity, «*the divinity of Jesus*», «*original sin*», and «*atonement*», and that the Bible was God's infallible word. I attended church regularly, was baptized, and took part in the communion. I was taught that without exception, these beliefs brought eternal salvation. To question these «*mysteries of God*» was a sin, and to doubt these «*gospel truths*» would bring about my eternal damnation in Hell. Faith was to accept and believe in the unbelievable, so do not ask unanswerable questions.

**Q: How were you introduced to Islam in such an environment?**

A: I married a Muslim thirteen years ago, and although I had many Muslim friends, I was not in contact with very many faithful Muslim believers. Most of the Muslims I knew neither had the conviction to propagate Islam, nor had the detailed knowledge of the faults of Christian belief to show me the right path. Eight years ago, a new neighbor, who had been raised as a Baptist before converting to Islam and was married to a Muslim man, befriended me. *Alhamdulillah*, she was knowledgeable, loved Allah and was concerned enough to introduce me to Islam.

Some of my convert friends are extraordinary in that they felt uneasy with Christianity or with Western materialistic values and actively searched for the truth until they found Islam.

I, on the other hand, was not in the beginning searching for anything, and I feel that it was only the Blessings of Allah, *Subhanahu wa ta'allah* that this knowledgeable and faithful woman came into my life. She provided me with books on comparison religion and the basics of Islam, and to my astonishment, all of my questions, objections, and debates were rebutted or answered beautifully and reasonably.

**Q: How did you then become convinced that Islam was the true path?**

A: After rereading the Bible, I found that this «*infallible word of God*» had errors. How could that be - if it actually was the word of God? My only conclusion was that it had been tampered with and corrupted. I also searched for that most important doctrine of Christianity which is a triune god. The prophets of the Bible, including Jesus (A.S.) emphatically stressed that the Lord - our God is ONE. I also looked at the history of Christianity, the church, and the Bible and found much evidence of pagan influence and assimilation.

The All-Merciful, All-Powerful, and All-Just God needed and demanded the punishment of the innocent and sinless Jesus (A.S.) so that he could forgive us of our sins and wrongdoings. If a human judge or leader were to do this, I would consider him corrupt, oppressive, or may be even crazy!

After being convinced of the faults of Christian beliefs, she then guided me to the understanding that Jesus (A.S.) was a created human messenger and was himself submissive to Allah and under His control.

Then, we studied, compared, and read English translation of The Quran, and she taught me some of the history of Islam and struggles of Prophet Muhammad (Peace and blessings of Allah be upon him and his pious and pure progeny) and the early Muslims.

I could not deny the truth, simplicity, and logic of the absolute Oneness of Allah (*Tawheed*) and said the *Shahadeh* (declaration of faith) with total conviction and love.

I thank Allah for sending this dear friend to me, and I always ask Allah to bless this wonderful woman in this life and especially in the next life for all of her compassion towards me and for leading me to the right path of Islam.

**Q: When you declared your Islam and followed the teachings of Islam, did you find any difficulties or trouble from your husband, family, and relatives?**

A: When I declared that I was a Muslim, I asked my husband if he would feel embarrassed to be seen with me in public (in America) since I needed to wear the modest dress or *hijab*. I was so relieved when he said: «*Do what you must, but I will be very proud and happy with you if you want to be mahajjebe*». My husband, *Alhamdulillah*, had become much more knowledgeable and a very good and practicing Muslim.

My Christian family was not pleased by my becoming Muslim but still refused to discuss the issues. I told them: «*If I am wrong and Islam is wrong*» «*Astaghfirullah*» do you want me to be angry with you on the Judgment Day when God will punish the disbelievers of the truth? Or if the situation is reversed «*and it is*» I do not want you to blame me for your punishment (for associating others with God). Let's discuss and search for the truth». I wrote a poem to try to reach them, and on other occasions, I have tried different means to try to open their minds to the truth. They always refused to consider any other possibility than Christianity, and it hurts me that they are lost, but, *Inshallah*, I will keep trying to reach them.

**Q: Do you remember some of the incidents that you encountered with your relatives?**

A: I went once to Louisiana to visit my grandparents, and three of my uncles dropped by. One of them said: «*Ha Ha, what is this? You are a Mohammadan, and your husband will have a harem with lots of wives!*»

I replied: «*Uncle, how many times have you been married?*» He said: «*Three times*». I asked the next, and he said: «*I am now on my fifth*». He then proceeded to curse all of his ex-wives. The third uncle said that he was free now but had also been divorced four times.

I then said: «*My husband has no other wives. The situations that you describe sounds to me like sequential polygamy with very little responsibility. Also Islam does not require or promote polygamy but has instead put limits on the practice. A man is not allowed to marry more than four wives and must treat all his wives exactly equally. If he cannot be perfectly just, he must limit himself to one*».

I continued: «*I know of no cases, among the many Muslims that I have met, of a man who has three or four wives. I have heard of a couple of cases of two wives, but I have not personally met any. Also, divorce is still a rare occurrence among Muslims. And lastly, if I did become ill or disabled, and my husband felt the need of having another wife, I am secure that he would continue to take care of my needs and my children's needs. I would not be tossed aside like yesterday's garbage*». My uncles were speechless.

**Q: How do you describe the American's view of Islam?**

A: Americans, in general, are very ignorant about Islam. There is much anti-Islamic propagandas, lies, and stereotyping. Occasionally, we, Muslim women (as we are easily identifiable), are verbally abused. But for the most part, we are not bothered. Sometimes, especially when Americans find we speak their language, they become very curious, and it opens the way for dialogue and interesting questions and even understanding.

**Q: What about your current activities for the cause of the Call?**

A: I am very fortunate to live in Dearborn, Michigan, with its large population of Muslims. We now have many opportunities for learning and practicing Islam. Being a Muslim is so very precious in the society I live in. All of my beliefs, intentions, thoughts, and actions are centered on the One Almighty Allah. Every deed has a real purpose and a real consequence.



Subhanallah, I now have many good faithful believers as friends including a large and rapidly growing group of convert Muslims. We have formed a supportive organization called United Muslim Women Association or (U.M.W.A.) through which we actively strengthen each other as Muslim women, friends, wives, and mothers. We have similar backgrounds, English is our primary language, and we share a special understanding of the problems and difficulties that we may encounter.

For example, some converts may face severe isolation from former friends and families. Most of us are trying to raise good Muslim children in a Western, anti-Islamic culture. We all need to strive continually and increase our knowledge. *Alhamdulillah*, we have a good-sized lending library of many of the available books on Islam printed in English. We print a newsletter and are concerned with da'wah work in our community at large. We also try to reach out and find other new or potential converts. We try to make contacts with other English speaking groups. We go to various Islamic Centers and Mosques situated in our area, and some of the Sheikhs come and speak to our group personally. We have access to a growing body of Islamic resources.

**Q: Are there significant problems that face the new converts or the new generations of Muslims?**

A: Converts (because they had been misled before and therefore are cautious) search, scrutinize, and actively seek knowledge of the truth. We, in general, do not take our religion for granted and are extremely aware of the value of our fight of Islam.

My major concern for the future is that our youth need more Islamic schools to buffer them from the negative and evil influences of a materialistic and hostile society. For example, I have had confrontations with my 10-year-old daughter's school principal for the last two years over her obligatory fasting for the Month of *Ramadan*. He told me: *«Your daughter has lost one month of her life and education because of following man made rules written for different place and time»*.

Our children attend after school Arabic and religion lessons, but they desperately need all day schools to defend them from un-Islamic ideology.

There are also a growing number of 3rd and 4th generation immigrant children who do not know enough Arabic to gain a concrete understanding of their religion without social assistance. There are many obstacles to opening Islamic schools in America, but we must somehow find a way.

**Q: How did you find the Muslim women in Lebanon?**

A: In fact, I have mixed feelings about the Muslim women in Lebanon and in the other Arab countries as well: I am happy, on the one hand, for the Islamic revival that is adopted by many women who became committed to their religion and to call for it, especially after the previous era that was dominated by the Western cultural attack. But on the other hand, I feel very sorry and even resentful for the fall of many Muslim women who blindly imitate the Western traditions of moral decline.

I felt particularly ashamed of the women I saw dressing indecent clothes and acting in an indecent manner.



I call on these women, from an experienced point of view, to go back to the arms of their religion, and they will really be happy and proud.

## THE SWISS SISTER

«ARIANE BAETWEYLER KHALIL»

*Islam Has Changed My Life Both Socially And Personally. I Felt Happy That I Am On the Right Path*

She came to Lebanon, not merely to visit her husband's family, but to take on intensive Islamic course. All who have seen her were impressed by her love of knowledge and her insistence on getting convincing and in-depth answers to all her questions. They were all also impressed by her profound sense of responsibility towards Islam and the duty of calling for it in her environment.

Sister Ariane visited our offices, and we had this interview with her.

**Q: Allah has blessed you with Islam, could you tell us about your life before Islam?**

A: I am a twenty-year-old Swiss whose name is Ariane Baetwyler Khalil. I finished my secondary education in 1992. Afterwards, I used to work in a bookshop. Before that I spent for around one month studying law, but I soon found out that it was not what I wanted to learn. I was working at the bookshop to get some money. I liked the work there because I met many different persons.

One can consider my early teenage life as normal. I was going to school like all the others, supported by my parents, and enjoying my free time. But I felt I was different from others because I preferred to have long discussions with elders than to go to parties or to dance, or I liked to stay at home for hours painting or writing poems. I have never had many friends but rather a very good few. Though I am a social person, but if I do not really trust people around me, I do not try to get in touch with them. I have never liked to go out with others who, on the one hand, pretended to be my friends, and on the other hand, did not care whether I joined them or not.

**Q: Were you a religious person? What was your idea about religion?**

It must have been at the age of 15 that God had become secondary to me. The primary importance of my life was this world and the tasks I had to fulfill in it. I was looking for an ideology which had to be based on rationality and humanity but not on any religion. I was not convinced about my own religion because *first*, I knew, there were other religions which we also considered to be right; *second*, religion for me meant in most of the cases to believe in something without having a proof for it or even to believe in something that is hard to prove scientifically; *third*, because everything we were taught in school was in the name of science not in the name of God, we were taught at school religion too, but rather as a scientific subject and not as a spiritual. The gap between God and me grew from day to day, though, I never denied His existence. I just was not sure about anything surpassing my logic as do metaphysics and philosophy. I liked to speak about these things but without being convinced about anything in particular. Many theories seemed to be possible to me, as long as they were denied from humanity. I even did not want to be convinced about a certain theory in order not to become narrow minded. The most important thing to me was to be good to others and to help as much as I could never mind who

was in need of my help or what kind of help he or she afforded. That made part of my educational heritage which was mostly Christian ideology mixed with Western freedom.

**Q: Do you still have a negative attitude towards religion?**

Religion for me was something to be inherited, that meant to me that most of the people had a certain religion just because they were born in a country where this religion existed or because of their fore fathers and not because of conviction one could get through studying it. My own belief faded away, thinking that being a Christian was accidental and not determined by God for my parents were Christians, too, and I was living in a Christian country. Accepting the idea that the five biggest religions of the world, as there are Christianity, Judaism, Islam, Buddhism and Hinduism, were all right, I neglected the dangerous aspects of such a view. Instead of enriching my knowledge and widening my horizon it puzzled and confused me, leading me to resignation and complete loss of faith.

**Q: What saved and rescued you from this state of confusion?**

A: This dizziness increased when I met my future husband in Switzerland. He was a convinced Muslim, though not practicing the rites of Islam properly. He explained and defended his point of view whenever he could but in a way I could not benefit from. It was not so much his fault but a matter of linguistic misunderstanding and intolerance on my part which I could not manage to suppress although I tried very hard. Seeing him being very sure of what he was thinking and saying and what he was believing in, I despaired. I thought he was narrow minded, intolerant, and also on the border of being fanatic. But I loved him for so many other reasons that I wanted to stay with him. We decided to put an end to our controversies which lasted sometimes for hours without coming to a clear conclusion. We had spent our time together for half a year when he went to Kuwait for almost two years. We met each other twice in Cyprus. The second time we got married. I was nineteen and still Christian. Back in Switzerland, he began to take care of his religious duties. I was shocked, first, feeling cheated because we had agreed on neglecting the religious gap between us. Then, when I saw him praying for the first time, something strange happened with me. I could not bear it, and I began to feel very sad and desperate. Nothing could soothe me.

**Q: What happened then?**

A: Two inner forces seemed to fight against each other; my heart felt like as if it was torn into pieces. I even reached a point where I wanted to die in order to get rid of my confusion and pain. This struggle lasted for some days. It was a horrible time for me. My body reflected my mental situation. I was very nervous, not knowing whether I had to laugh about this life, which sometimes seemed to be ridiculous, or to cry about it because I could not get its true meaning. Then, one night, God, The Almighty, took this burden from me and put the seed of Islam into my heart. Through His Mercy He showed me the way towards Himself. I was at home with my husband when

I suddenly said that I wanted to embrace Islam. I said: *«I do not want to go out of this house anymore without wearing the veil»*. He was very surprised about my intention. He could not understand why I suddenly wanted to change. Neither did I, but I was very sure about it. It was the first time for me that I take such a very important decision without having thought about its consequence. Maybe this feeling I had was the only way to lead me towards Islam, because my mind was closed and not ready to analyze any information in an objective way. My husband had doubts about the sincerity of my wish and said that if I wanted to change just because of him he would not accept it. I assured him that it was because of my own sake that I liked to become a Muslim and that I was convinced about it. He answered that if I was really sure about what I was going to do he could not prevent me from doing it. Moreover, it was his duty to help me to take this first step towards Islam which meant that he had to teach me the Tashahud. He wrote it down both in Arabic and Phonetics. I could already read Arabic at that time. After having said the Tashahud I felt very happy and satisfied though I did not exactly know what my future would be like.

**Q: Would you tell us about the impact of embracing Islam on your milieu and the problems you faced?**

A: First of all, my friends knew that I had changed. They accepted it after having spoken with me about the reasons pushing me to do that. They still come to see me. I am happy to have some good friends who really like me for what I am and not for what the people think I am. Then my brother got to know about it (he is two years younger). He did not mind and joked about my fear to tell my parents. Because I was already living in a separate house with my husband, they knew about my converting on the phone. My father said: *«I knew from the beginning that you would do it - you would change»*. It was not happy news to him because he was a pessimist. He began to imagine tragedies like that if in case of a divorce my husband would take the children from me, and so on. But both of them accepted my decision and up to now they are still ready to help me.

The problem was my grandparents. It bothered my grandmother very much when she came to Switzerland (They are Italian).

**Q: What are the tangible positive changes in your life since you adopted Islam?**

A: Islam changed my life both on the personal level and the social relations. On the personal level, I have become more careful about what I do and more conscious about it, because I started to care about the life in the Hereafter. I felt kind of happy because I was on the right way. After I adopted Islam, I started to read about it and what had been irrational to me at the beginning turned out to be very rational and convincing.

Also reading The Quran, which I had done before without understanding anything, has become very instructive.

On the social level, I cannot say that the social life I have with Muslims is better because most Muslims do not practice Islam the way they should. If I should have converted because of them then I would have been still Christian.

**Q: What can you tell us about methods to call non-Muslims to Islam based on your own experience?**

A: I would never go to people and tell them right away that Islam is the Religion leading to the truth and that it is the only perfect religion because they would misunderstand it. They would think we are crazy to say such a thing because where we have the proofs from. We cannot tell someone who does not believe in The Quran, and may be not even in his own religion, that there are verses (passages) treating this subject very clearly. They would also think that we try to put ourselves above others.

I also believe that especially in the case of foreign Muslims (Arab or Iranian callers), people feel offended. They would compare their mission with the missions of Christian missionaries who used to do a lot of wrong abroad, forcing people to convert in the name of religion. They would be afraid of them, thinking that they may have the same intention and way of executing their will.

Further, Islam has to be introduced to people. Many do not know what Islam means and what it asks the human race to live and struggle for. The ideology of Islam is unknown. To fill this empty space, we have to begin to show up in public institutions and strengthen our call. We should inform our environment continuously about our religion, our activities, our goals, and our rights. We should have big organizations that coordinate all the activities.

In every country, there should be at least one administration and also one sheikh. This is very important because people who are eager to learn often do not get a chance to do so, because there is no religious authority (not in the sense of power but of knowledge).

We have to tell the Europeans to separate between Islam and the practices some Muslim link to Islam because this makes the view blurred to others. Muslims should know more about Islam so that they could give a good idea about it.

The best way to reach people nowadays is the scientific way, because most of them trust all sciences.

**Q: What is the role you are personally assuming or the role you intend to assume in serving the Islamic Call?**

A: Before I serve, I have to know enough about Islam, and that is why I came to Lebanon. There are many Swiss people who converted to Islam and still do not know anything about it.

So, I am planning to organize courses and give lectures to others so that they know more and more about Islam.

I think that my place in the near future is going to be in Switzerland because I know this country and its population and my rights and limits. Most of all I could serve the Islamic Call there. I am preparing an enquiry on students graduating from high school (secondary education). I want to get a clear picture of what well-educated Swiss youth know about Islam.

**Q: What are the potentials and prospects of the Islamic Call in your country?**

A: The problem is that we have some Islamic institutions like that of «*Ahl Ul-Bayt (A.S.)*» that care more about men than women. Moreover, there is no special Islamic program. The Islamic call is still weak and needs more callers and real efforts.

Also people prefer to acquire Islam from a neutral source and not from political parties.

**Q: How do you view the Muslim's current state of affairs and that of women in particular?**

A: In general, tradition and customs spoil Islam: There are things done in the name of Islam that are non-Islamic. Women do not know much about their rights or duties.

Women should put more effort in acquiring Islam and should take more initiatives in the current life. Men must give women the chance to serve the Islamic call if they want.

**Q: Do you wish to address the Muslims from the forum of Noor Al-Islam?**

A: It is a very good magazine but I wonder why there are more Arabic pages than English. I suggest that they specify a special corner for translating some verses from the Holy Book (Quran).

At last, I would like to ask Muslims to have the patience that Imam Hussein (A.S.) had to reach his goal.

Moreover, they should be open minded, logical, and rational; i.e. I advise Muslims to try to cooperate with non-Muslims and try to find the common points between all the religions. I think they should benefit from anyone who can offer them good things even if it was from an atheist, but first they have to be surer of their own religion.

## **THE ITALIAN MUSLIM BROTHER (AMMAR):**

### **ISLAM ARISES IN OUR COUNTRY AND IN EUROPE**

This interview with the editor of «*Il Puro*», the Italian Islamic Magazine, was published by «*The Line*», The London based Islamic magazine. We republish it here with some minor changes, due to its importance and to enable a wider section of Muslim readers to learn about the Muslims in Italy.

### **Please introduce yourself, and when did you embrace Islam?**

My name is Ammar. I am an Italian Muslim of 54 years of age who embraced Islam ten years ago.

### **Q: Why did you convert to Islam?**

A: Before I became Muslim, I was active in Italian politics; to be more precise I was a militant of the Italian extra parliamentary right wing. My interest in Islam started with the Islamic Revolution in Iran.

When I came to know of this Islamic Revolution, I liked the message which was coming out. It was against Communism and Capitalism, and therefore, it had the same objectives that I had or at least this was my impression.

Mine was primarily curiosity based on the political message coming from the Islamic Revolution but nothing more.

I have to open a bracket here and explain that before I became a Muslim during the time of political activism, I was a Traditionalist: I belonged to that current of thought that sees in the West a decadent phase in the history of humanity. Some of the major writers of these international currents of thought were Rene Guenon (a Communist who converted to Islam), Burcard, Evola, Valsan... All of them believed that Western society is a rotten one, that Western man is decadent because he has lost his spirituality and has moved away from God, and that man needs to find God again. I believed likewise, but these thoughts for me were only intellectual digressions. My life was like that of any other Western, a life empty of real spirituality. I was condemning this society, but I myself was an active son of it, until I met Islam which provides you with a clear and distinctive set of rules and regulations to guide a person towards spirituality and, ultimately, God. Through Islamic teachings, I have understood many things, among which is that Islam, besides being a guide for our spiritual life, is also a doctrine for liberation for all humanity.

### **Q: Could you describe the present situation in Italy, and how many converts are there?**

A: The situation of Islam in Italy is undoubtedly a growing one. There are people entering Islam continuously, however, it is difficult to say how many converts there are. We must make a distinction between those who convert to practice Islam and those who proclaim their faith only for interior motives.



I would say that to my knowledge the practicing Muslim converts in Italy are about 500 out of a total of 2000 Italian converts. I would like to say that Islamic propagation in Italy is nonexistent.

I, together with a small group of brothers and sisters, have two and a half years ago formed a news agency, and we have seen that, with the help of Allah, the interest in Islam is growing. We receive many letters, and recently we have had some conversions especially among the young. For example, a few months ago an Italian Nazi-skinhead after various correspondences embraced Islam. Obviously after his conversion he has totally changed. We have also many women who have converted. The majority of them come from a university background, either current students or with a university degree.

**Q: What are the problems for Italian Muslims?**

A: Concerning the problems of Muslims in Italy, I can say that there are many. For example, we have no cemetery where a Muslim can be buried according to the rules of Islam. There has been no formal understanding between the Muslims and the Italian authority. The Italian government has had some agreement with other religious minorities like the Christian, Protestants, and Jews whereas with the Islamic community there has been no formal recognition. This obviously is a problem in legal terms because it denies us legitimacy.

Then there is the problem within the community itself which reflects the situation of the Islamic communities across Europe and the entire Muslim world. We have practically two types of Islam, an Islam that the Western mass-media has defined fundamentalist the Islam of those who want to practice their religion, who wish to live according to it, who work for it, and whose ladies are proud of their Islamic *hijab*. Then there is the «*Exotic Islam*» liked by certain Western commentators because it is a passive Islam which is born in the mosque and dies in the mosque. This is the type of Islam towards which the West has shown its courtesy and given freedom.

Our Islam is a live Islam, the Islam of Prophet Muhammad (P.B.U.H.) and of his rightful successors who have shown us, with their examples and their life, that Islam besides praying is also a struggle.

**Q: We have heard of some problems the foreigners are facing. Are the Muslims targeted as well?**

A: There is a problem of general discontent towards immigrants, primarily because, like in other countries of Europe, Italy is facing an economic crisis. Therefore, foreigners are seen by many nationals as those who take jobs from Italian nationals in an already depressed job market. There is no specific hate for Muslims, in fact. As far as I know, those who have become the target of the nationalist movement are non-Muslim or non-practicing Muslims who often are involved in clashes with locals. These are elements who do not practice Islam and who have found their way into the Italian crime society. They drink and go to places where alcohol is served. They do drugs and go to places where drugs are distributed. It is towards these that the local anger has turned. I do not see this as a problem for the Muslims nor do I see at the moment a problem coming from the right-wing

extremists. The world of the right-wing in Italy and Europe is very diverse. We have to make a distinction. There are, for example, groups of traditionalists that are great admirers of what Islam has achieved in Iran and other Islamic countries. They say that Europe is in decadence and that the salvation of Europe can come from Islam, and they have declared this fact on many occasions in their publication, and some of the Italian converts come from this background. Naturally, like me, when they enter Islam they leave their previous political activity.

We have to clearly identify where the real threat comes from. For example, I see a major threat from the left. They show themselves to be very sympathetic towards immigrants and willing to help them; however, their help is not unconditional. They want to integrate them within their own culture. They are willing to help as long as they give up their culture, their religion, and their way of being. The reality is that many circles in the West are a danger for Muslims and Islam, whether being those who physically attack them or those who blandish them with nice words.

**Q: Do you have freedom of worship in Italy, and do you have Muslim schools, organizations, mosques... etc? Can *hijab* be worn at schools and universities?**

A: I must say that at present for what concerns freedom of worship we have no problem. We can organize religious processions and congregational prayers in the open with minimum notice to the police, especially if the organizers are Italian citizens. In fact, in the city of Naples, we have been celebrating Eid-ul-Fitr for the last two years in a public park. We have held Quds Day demonstrations. Personally, as an Italian, I advise the police that we intend to march on such and such a date in such a place with no further bureaucratic complications.

Concerning wearing of *hijab*, there is no restriction in schools or universities. As a matter of fact, you can wear *hijab* also on the passport photograph.

Concerning the number of organizations, schools, and mosques, we can say that these are non-existent. There is one mosque in Rome and one in Milan; however, there are many private places where Friday prayers are held and where Muslims meet. There are no schools for Muslim children.

In the last few years with the growing number of Muslims, some organizations have been formed based on nationality. However, very recently, an organization has been formed that includes representatives of each community with the purpose of formulating demands to put to the Italian government with one voice.

**Q: Does the situation in Bosnia make you afraid for the future of Islam in Europe?**

A: Personally, I believe that the Bosnian situation could be the forerunner of a more serious situation across Europe, due to the historical animosity that has existed between the West and Islam.

Despite what the Western propaganda says, history has proved that the growth of Islam is not due to its «*sword*» but rather to its message. That is

why today, in spite of everything, Islam is the fastest growing religion in the world - a growth which threatens the hegemony of certain powers which, in order to defend themselves and their interests, have created an elaborate network which spreads lies and a distortion of the Islamic message in order to create animosity between the people of the West and Islam. This role was once held by bigot Christian church leaders. Now that Christianity is no more than a private belief, the new forerunners of this fight are the leaders of the secular superpowers and multinational directors who want the world to be nothing more than a big market where they can sell their goods and products. Of course if such a situation of hatred is established, it would be even worse for the converts because people hate more their own nationals who change religion since it is illogical for them that an Italian or a European changes; whereas, it is logical for them that an Arab, Indian, or Pakistani is Muslim. Therefore, I fear that in a future, which may be not so close, we could see an open anti-Islamic man infestation developing in Europe.

**Q: What message do you have for the converts?**

A: First of all I would like to give them my congratulations for the choice they have made since what they have chosen can give them happiness, stability, and equilibrium. What I say to them is that the most important thing is to grow spiritually within Islam. Having taken the first step and declaring «*La Ilaha Illallah, Muhammadan Rasoolullah*», we must then deepen our knowledge of Islam to progress; otherwise, we lose a good opportunity. We become like a person who is invited to have lunch at a beautifully prepared table with the most delicious food, and yet he only eats the breadcrumbs that have fallen under the table. In front of us God has laid this magnificent table. It is up to us to nourish ourselves with its foods. Spiritual growth must go hand in hand with any development because Islam is not only a religion but a total liberation.

Thank you for your time in giving this interview. We hope that, *Inshallah*, the Muslims in your own country will be successful in spreading the message of Islam, as Allah pleases and wishes.

## THE GERMAN MUSLIM BROTHER

CHRISTOF MARCINCOFISKI

*I was attracted to Islam by its conformity with the human instinct and it providing the adequate solutions for the problems of mankind.*

During my stay in Western Germany, I met many Muslims of German origin whom Allah (S.W.T.) guided to His right religion. Those who are beginning to enter in God's religion as groups of both men and women of all classes and cultural levels have reached tens or even hundreds of thousands in number. The influence of Islam on German intellectuals is not new; it goes back to the last century and even before that. The great German poet «Goethe» has praised Islam and its Prophet in his wonderful poems. And today, the enthusiastic activities of the German Muslim community in the field of the call have enabled more and more Germans to be introduced to Islam and find what they were looking for in it; Islam will save these people and enable them to denounce the disgusting materialistic civilization. What is more impressive is that these people, having been guided to Islam, will want to guide members of their family and society to the right path. There is no doubt that these millions of Westerners who choose Islam as their religion, in spite of all the glamour of the Western way of life, are evidence against all those Muslims who are running after their materialistic desire.

Out of these German brothers I came to know, I would like to present to the readers of *Noor Al-Islam* the German brother Christof Marcincoliski, whom I had this interview with about how he became a Muslim, and how he found Islam, as well as what he believes the duties of those who work for the cause of Islam are.

I asked brother Christof who did not change his original name:

### Q: How did you become a Muslim and why?

A: I find Islam, firstly, to be against idolism with all its forms that appears, one way or another, in all the other religions, and which insults the mind. It is the religion of a pure unitary doctrine that gives the clearest idea of our great Creator... It also draws in a wonderful and rational way the ideal relation between man and his Creator what gives life its precious value, makes man feel reassured about his fate, and motivates him to assume a line of positive work that enables him to build life in the right way.

I also found that its book, The Glorious Quran, is not a book that is far away from life and its development. It is not a book to be read in mosques and then put away on the shelves. It is a book that draws a comprehensive system for the life of the individual and the society which is both realistic and able to respond to the needs of man in his life in a balanced and fair way for it does not let either of the needs of the body or the soul to overcome one another. In fact, this is a very vital organization for mankind which we do not find in the other religions.

Moreover, I used to live with a group of friends whom I found to be totally lost; although they believed that a balanced and just system that gives a reason and an objective for their life should exist. But since they did not believe in God and did not allow such a system to organize their life, they were totally plunged in their personal life and have completely ignored the public life... This unacceptable reality was refused by my mind and my feelings, and it was only natural for me to seek deliverance in Islam, the

religion of the right path. I made a great effort to understand its principles and teachings. I found in it what I was looking for, and I consider myself to be born again. Moreover, I do not feel sorry for the pleasures my new Islamic belief has made unlawful. Anyway, I am convinced that all what Islam bans is but evil and bad, and all that Islam allows would raise my worth in this life and in the Hereafter.

**Q: Do you have, as a Muslim, problems in the society?**

A: Yes, I do, because the Westerners are against religion in general, and because they want to be with their god at the same level, which is impossible. Man is but a creation and he cannot understand the essence of God. And because they are against religion, the imperial Western powers tried to create some problems for the Muslims and to limit their freedom in many areas, despite the fact that they claim to be democratic and defend man's rights and freedom. As for the people, they claim to be tolerant. But this is not true, as every Muslim feels and suffers of, especially with the emergence of the new Nazi movements. On the other hand, the status of Muslims in Germany may be better than in other European countries.

**Q: What do you think of the present conditions of Islam and Muslims?**

A: In fact, man should feel very sorry for the differences that divide groups that aim to fragment Muslims instead of uniting them, although they have the greatest message, the most glorious heritage, and vast wealth that ought to give them a unique position in this world. But I am very interested and concerned in the new Islamic upheaval that has a better understanding of Islam and seeks to establish it on this earth and especially in some of the Islamic countries. However, I am afraid of the inherent weakness that is a result of fragmentation, isolationism and hastiness. I hope that those in charge will try to correct any defects. I also like to mention here in particular, the problem of secular fragmentation and the false accusations made by some people without any consideration of the higher Islamic interest.

We hope, as Muslims living in the West, that the Islamic march in the West will be consolidated and gain more and more followers, for there is good readiness to adopt it especially among intellectuals. But we need to improve our call methods by means of action before words and information though there is great need to improve this side too.

But before anything else we need to be committed, tolerant, and patient because we have a big goal that needs a lot of sacrifices.

Finally, I want to tell the German and other European Muslims - although there is no difference in Islam between one race and another - that they have to reflect the greatness and the beauty of Islam, because we are in a sensitive and critical position, and we cannot serve our Islam if we make any mistakes or misunderstandings.

## The American Sister

### FATIMA

*Islam brought happiness into my life and gave me a feeling of respect to myself and the others.*

*Just as truth emits a light that guides those who dive deep in the darkness and those who are led astray, You, our Lord, guide whom You wish to Your straight path, those who pray for Your help in the dark night of their confusion, to be met by Your gracious guidance.*

**From this deep darkness, the American sister Fatima was able to escape and become a new Muslim sister who was guided by the «Light of Islam». In this interview, she tells us (at her home in Kaifoun in Mount Lebanon) the story of how she became a Muslim.**

### **Q: Please tell us about your environment and the circumstances that led you to Islam?**

A: First, I would like to welcome you. I am an American from the city of Denver. I was born in 1951. I called myself Fatima after Fatima al-Zahra (A.S.). I have a university degree in nursing, and I am interested in the various fields of culture especially religion. I have worked as a nurse in America, but now I am a housewife. I take care of my family and my Lebanese husband whom I met after I became a Muslim. We live in this beautiful Lebanese town. And I always try to develop myself as a Muslim by learning more about Islam to serve my religion and my message.

I thank Allah, (*Subhanahu wataallah*), for helping me find the truth, Islam. As He offers this path to all His creatures, and so to me, and I am so grateful. It is as if I «*came home*» after a long journey and finally sat before the heart of knowing that there are answers to all my questions, and I can have peace of mind in knowing that ultimate truth does exist. That is because Christianity took a sectarian detour in its origin and did not adhere to the truth as taught by Prophet Jesus (A.S.). So the present day Christianity is based on basic misconceptions. Growing up in a Christian environment, as I did, gives one, as myself, some confusing concepts such as altered literature (Bible), indirect relationship with Allah (S.W.T.), separation of church from political economic structure, forgiveness through the «*crucifixion*» of Jesus, doctrine of original sin, son of Allah (S.W.T.), and some left over pagan ideas such as Christmas, Easter, and the «*trinity*»... These are the negative aspects, and I mention these in retrospect, not knowing they were misconceptions at the time of learning and practicing Christianity. I did wonder at the inconsistencies, and I did ask some questions which were left to ...«*When you grow up you will understand*». Well I grew up and still did not understand. The positive things that Christianity gave to me were knowledge of God, respect for God, and a social structure adherent to religious laws as they knew them to be. It also gave me some knowledge base to continue my search for the truth. I am thankful to these experiences, and I am also thankful to my parents and grandparents who did the best they could to let me know about a relationship with God.



My family in the U.S.A. is German in origin and strictly Protestant Lutheran in religion. I attended Lutheran school for 13 years and lived in a fairly isolated German, Lutheran social atmosphere. I attended daily religious study classes - a «*typical*» American upbringing. If one can generalize, my rearing was much more «*religious*» and attentive than the norm.

I became an inactive member of the church in my early adult years as I became disillusioned with its inability to answer those questions I had and its inability to address social and political realities in the U.S.A., and I began to look at various philosophies and other branches of Christianity. I made an attempt to return to the Lutheran church for one year, however, I found it impossible to honestly participate as an adult in the doctrines I found to be more and more false. Bewilderment within myself was my ever present baggage as I wondered why I could not find inner peace in knowing what the truth is, as I never gave up the prospect that Allah (S.W.A.) had created all of us and this world so exquisitely with the truth contained therein. I feel within myself that there was a «*Complete Truth*» given to us by our God; however, for some reason I could not find it.

#### **Q: How did you come to embrace Islam?**

A: In the middle of my third decade of life (*Alhamdulillah*), I more and more felt distress about looking at the world around myself, participating in the world, be holding a future, and still not having the missing puzzle piece. I feared the Day of Judgment and did not know how to face it in my then present state of incomplete knowledge. At that time I quite simply prayed. Yes, I prayed. I prayed that God would show the right path to me and lead and guide me.

Within two weeks, a doctor I was working with at that time (my profession is nursing) began to speak with me about her Islamic faith. She was from Pakistan and Shia. She did not have books about Islam in English for me; however, she shared what she knew. I was quite interested and wanted more information.

At that time, I was completing my nursing education at the university, so I looked at the university schedule to see if there was perhaps any class about Islam. I found an «*Islamic Study*» class and took it for one semester. It was a general survey course, historical in nature. I gleaned what information from it and from the classmates - many of whom were Muslims. Through my participation in this class I was able to meet an American sister who had become a Muslim through the teaching of her Iranian husband and the Iranian community. She helped me so much (*Alhamdulillah*) in my study of Islam and in many of its aspects of daily living and worship. Through her friendship and care I was introduced to a group of believers in the local cultural Iranian and Lebanese community.

Nearly after one year of study since I had beseeched Allah (*Subhanahu wataallah*) for help in showing me the right path I became a Muslim during the month of *Ramadan* (*Alhamdulillah*). How gracious and beneficent Allah (S.W.A.) has been to me in my life to guide me to the truth!



**Q: Could you tell us about the impact of your embracement of Islam on your milieu, and what are the problems, if any, that you now face?**

A: Embracing Islam does mean inevitable change in one's life. Every change adherent to the faith has been a joy in my life. Initially, I can say some have been a bit startling and difficult; however, how can I ever not be pleased to change when I waited for so long to know the truth?

Personally, my impulse became to get all the information I could, to read books, to read The Quran, and to learn from other Muslims. The reciting of prayer and contemplation is my solace. I wear women's Islamic dress and feel a metamorphosis of subtle change by so doing. I did not know that this was essential when first studying Islam and was a bit taken aback when my sisters told me of this. I began this process slowly and realized that this mode of garmenting oneself is not only the cloth and what it covers but an inward spiritual journey as well. I truly feel my self respect. My honor for society and the Islamic «*body of believers*» has grown by covering appropriately. Our examples for Islamic dress come from the Household of the Prophet (P.B.U.H.) as Sayyeda Zeinab (A.S.) and Sayyeda Fatima Zahra (A.S.). Certainly their examples in behavior as wives, mothers, and members of society were intimately connected to their covering themselves, their self respect, and their honor for those around them.

The effect on my parents, children, and relatives was predictable I suppose. They adhere to Christian doctrine and see me as a lost, condemned soul. This has been the most difficult thing for me to lose the respect of my parents in this regard. I pray that they would follow the path of Islam. Of course, they still love me as their daughter and through the years have become more accepting of my change in dress, eating, etc. but the look in their eyes is not the same for me. They feel hurt by this change. I respect my parents and their commitment to their church and family.

My great happiness is the subsequent conversion of my three adult children to Islam (*Alhamdulillah*). They are studying their faith and each has in his heart the desire to serve Islam in propagation and service. My sons are currently being educated to teach, (*Inshallah*), and my daughter is a homemaker, mother, and wife.

Non-Muslim friends, who were truly friends, respect my decision to become a Muslim. Our relationship has become closer in some cases because we can discuss «*religion*» with more knowledge. They do nice, respectful things such as buy meat from the Islamic meat store to serve for me and provide a quiet room in which I can pray when I visit their home. In general, I have not lost friends and probably have gained.

In my employment at the hospital, fellow employees were quite accepting of me. They would cover my absence so I could pray, arrange their meal times so I could break my fast in *Ramadan*, and, in general, were open and sharing with me about their lack of knowledge of Islam which elicited many discussions. I started wearing Islamic dress to my work approximately one year after becoming a Muslim and six months after wearing it at home and socially. This provoked many questions from staff, patients, etc. They were accepting and respectful. My career advancement

was not affected, (*Alhamdulillah*), as the hospital wanted me to take a higher position as supervisor, However, I said I would not be able to attend the parties associated with the position as there was drinking of alcohol and dancing. So they said that this party attendance was mandatory; therefore, I declined the position.

**Q: On the personal level, do you feel more peaceful, secure, and relieved?**

A: Yes, all of the above: more peaceful, secure, and relieved, and as I said before, it was as if I have «*come home*». Islam covers in practical terms every aspect of life, and I see it as a continuing evolving process. I am ever humble before its greatness and completeness. Each day I learn new aspects of this path.

The Quran is the source of peace to me. My security comes from knowing more and more about the Prophet (P.B.U.H.) and the twelve Imams (A.S.) who provide a supreme example for living this life. There is not any problem I face which could compare to what Imam Hussein (A.S.) confronted at Karbala in his sacrifice.

The relief comes from now having a direct relationship with Allah (S.W.A.) without need of an intermediary, as Jesus (A.S.) is in Christianity. It states in the Quran [50: 16]: «*We are nearer to him than the regulate vein*». This is a very direct and close relationship we have with Allah (S.W.A.).

**Q: On the social relations level, do you feel the difference between your relations with Muslims now and those with non-Muslims in the past?**

A: Yes, there is a code of ethics and conduct prescribed and ordained by Allah on our relations between each other. We have The Quran and traditions of our Prophet (P.B.U.H.) and Imams (A.S.) to look to for guidance. I am grateful for these sources and examples.

I feel close in my relations with other Muslims. Certainly, we are all not perfect, and we all error in our caring for each other as «*one body*»; however, in general, there is a much higher level of mutual honesty, benevolence, and cooperation in the Muslim world compared to the non-Muslim world.

I did not leave Christianity because of not having benevolence, honesty, and cooperation; I left because the doctrine is incorrect. One can find many fine examples of loving, caring Christians such as in the community in which I was raised, but without the entire «*truth of Islam*» one is left, as a Christian, without all the rules for life and will inevitably feel lost in the social realm of life.

**Q: Do you suggest any specific methods, based on you own experience, to call non-Muslims to Islam?**

A: The example that we are in our everyday learning is one of the greatest ways to show that submission to Allah is part of our personality. This «*personality*» would hopefully be an impetus for some to examine Islam. I would encourage all who travel as Muslims to non-Muslim lands

for work or study or whatever reason not to abandon their example. Their behavior with non-Muslims is important, and too often what the non-Muslim sees of their actions is taken as Islamic behavior which is a deception and misleading to the non-Muslims.

Doctrine for the Christian, as it was for myself, may be the greatest reason for conversion to Islam. I would encourage any Christian to really study well the doctrine of Christianity. I believe true study of Christianity will lead one to Islam because of the many errors in logic and reasoning found therein. There are books available to give to them regarding misconceptions in the Bible, but point to even passages in the Bible itself proclaiming Prophet Muhammad (P .B.U.H.) as the final Messenger.

I truly appreciated and continue to appreciate the many fine Islamic books which have been translated into English. In the U.S.A., the Iranian foundations were most helpful in supplying these for my children and me.

**Q: What is the role you are personally assuming or the role you intend to assume in serving the Islamic Call?**

A: I believe the greatest role I can serve is to be a good wife, mother, and homemaker. I have a small baby and feel great prospect in being able to raise him in Islamic surroundings. Parenting is the most valuable undertaking for the future and certainly an all-consuming mission. We are most blessed to have as our examples for parenting our Prophet (P.B.U.H.), the Imams (A.S.), and their wives. Their hard work in parenting and working for the family helped us in Islam to, still, have a solid social and family structure network.

I feel there is a great need for Islamic children's books written in English. I am certainly not an illustrator but I have thoughts about their content. *Inshallah*, I can contribute my effort in this regard as well as any writing that is needed in general.

**Q: What are the potentials and prospects of the Islamic Call in your country?**

A: I am now living in Lebanon, but to give my view of the U.S.A. seems logical as I spent most of my life there. The potentials of the Islamic Call in the U.S.A. are great as the general population is good and accepting. They are a searching group with great disillusion with their present society.

Only Allah (S.W.A.) knows about the prospects for the Islamic Call in the U.S.A. I feel I can suppose that the prospect for the Americans present course is downfall and misery as it is not currently based on Islam, or even Christianity. It is a racial, secularist, floundering government and society.

**Q: What in your view is the state of Muslim women?**

A: I think we Muslim women have as our guide and example the faithful women of our Islamic history. Khadija (A.S.), Sayyeda Fatima Zahra (A.S.), Sayyeda Zeinab (A.S.), the wives of our Imams (A.S.), Hajjar (A.S.), Miriam (A.S.), the wife of Pharaoh (A.S.) etc... If we take their example as they struggled, suffered, and took their happiness and try to incorporate even a small part of their traits into our personalities, we would take more comfort and solace in the life that Allah (S.W.A.) has given to us. Does this

represent the current «*state of Muslim women?*» Probably not, because as stated before, we become entrapped in our cultures rather than Islam. We have no excuse because Allah (S.W.A.) has elevated women to an exalted position in Islam. Her rights are protected, and her status is individual in regard to her path of faithfulness.

**Q: Do you wish to address Muslims from the forum of Noor Al-Islam?**

A: I would like to add my voice to others having great concern about the influx of «*Hollywood Media*» into developing countries around the world. «*Hollywood*», I believe, has done much to destroy the limited social structure that existed in the U.S.A. maybe 30 to 40 years ago, and now is being incorporated into populations around the world, especially with the advent of the satellite dish, videos, CDs, cassettes; etc. Hollywood movies, music, and cartoons are currently the U.S.A.'s largest export, so its distribution will of course be propagated and protected worldwide by the private owners and the U.S. government. Remember when you turn on the television to any meaningless violence and inhumane behavior contained in many cartoons, movies, and T.V. programs, contrary to Islamic teachings, you are inviting a very potent and evil force into your home, and many will divert your children and your own attentions away from valuable subjects to disrupting and corrupting subjects.

Thank you for your kind consideration of my thoughts and words. I appreciate your diligent work and like to read the English section of *Noor Al-Islam*.

## CLEAR FACTS LEAD A BELGIAN COUPLE TO EMBRACE ISLAM

Following the Zionist invasion of Lebanon in 1982, Beirut was besieged for more than two months. The deteriorated situation motivated me to make the hard decision: Departure!

During a short cease-fire, we had the chance to leave the bunkers and cast a look on our homes and store shops. Everything was a ruin. I decided to leave the country to ease my nerves and start business abroad. The only route out was via Syria. From Damascus airport I left for Brussels, the capital of Belgium, where I was often for business or visits of relatives.

I reached the country on that Friday noon and went directly to my relative's house. The family was getting ready to spend the weekend at the seaside, a 100 km. away.

They welcomed me, praised Allah for my safety, and asked a lot of questions about the homeland, the friends, and the relatives, since the telephone services were inoperative.

My relative Said was a surgeon working in a big hospital; he was married with two children. He was bright, intellectual, and skilled in his profession, and with high morals and good reputation. He was committed to Eastern traditions despite spending many years in the West.

His only defect that saddened me was his indifference regarding Islam. Though he was of inborn purity (*Fitra*), he lacked the Islamic knowledge as a result of living in a non-Muslim country. Being fully occupied with his job, he had no time to get such religious information. Hence he led a western routine life.

I performed my prayer and sat to have some rest. My relative asked me to join them and spend the weekend at the seaside. Giving some excuses, I apologized but he was not convinced since he knew how much I loved swimming. He insisted, and I finally told him the real reason for my refusal. It was to avoid seeing women semi-naked (in their swimming suits) or in indecent situations. He then suggested spending the couple of days in his friend's villa, Dr. Bernard, a physician who worked in the same hospital where my relative used to work. He phoned him, and we soon were on our way to his villa in Louvain, 30 km. south of Brussels. He welcomed us warmly since the Westerners suffer loneliness and hardly enjoy visits of their relatives. It was a splendid villa amid a big garden, with a swimming pool at one corner. In the small room near the pool, we put on our swimming suits and jumped into the clean water. We enjoyed swimming then got out to stretch on the green grass and enjoy the warm sun. I looked at the villa and was taken by a surprise when a beautiful woman, the doctor's wife, in her swimming suit came in our direction to welcome the dear guest. The husband introduced her to me, and she stretched her hand to shake mine. I drew back and apologized for not shaking hand with her. She became red in the face and quickly returned to the villa. Her husband followed in anger, and my relative exploded blaming me for such backward behavior, finalism, and religious prejudice. How could I humiliate such a famous doctor and his wife - a famous psychiatrist? Could Islam be disgusting to such an extent? I tried to pacify his anger and told him of my

readiness to apologize to them and explain the situation. He went inside and came with the husband who was still angry. He said: *«You have humiliated us. How could you refuse shaking my wife's hand? Are not we clean enough?»* I said: *«Please, do call your wife; I want to apologize to her»*. He went, and she came with him, still vexed. She said: *«Am I dirty? Suppose I were, is it a matter of good behavior not to shake my hand while you are my guest? Are you such a fanatic to consider us filthy or infidels?»*

I said: *«It is nothing to do with filth or infidelity. I shook your husband's hand just few minutes before you came to join us»*.

*«What is it then?»* she asked.

I thought that the best means of defense is to attack. Seeking Allah's help, I said: *«I used to think that the Europeans are objective and discuss the matters objectively. No doubt, scientific progress affects the social behavior, especially of those highly educated individuals. You could have taken the matter easy and asked about the reasons for my behavior. Instead, your reaction was quite strange vis-à-vis such simple matters. I think the concept of civilized or uncivilized has nothing to do with the educated or the uneducated, poverty or wealth, and the developing or the developed countries»*.

They said nothing, and I added: *«Dr. Bernard, whose beautiful villa is this?»* He said, *«My wife's and mine»*.

I said: *«What would you say if I seized a part of it to be my own? Would you agree on no conditions?»*

He said: *«It is nonsense! Why should I agree?»*

I said: *«If it were the jungle law, I could do it at my will. Yet, there are laws that regulate the social relations»*.

He asked: *«What do you intend to say?»*

I said: *«You don't agree at my sharing with you your property. Could you agree at sharing with you your wife?»*

*She is beautiful; every man wants to kiss her or shake her hand. Even I would do it if my instincts were not controlled. However, I act through laws decreed by my Lord, the Creator of all. It is a matter of religious instructions and Islamic behavior.*

*Have you ever been to a jeweler's shop? Have you seen precious stones thrown here and there? Can everyone touch them? Are not they kept in a safe place where no one can get them? We, Muslims, consider woman as a precious stone. Not everyone can touch or enjoy her beauty. We don't allow one to degrade her or damage her chastity. It is not the same as in your country where woman has lost her female nature and become a commodity, a plaything for all vices and indecencies. She is no more considered a human being. All your feminist organizations are means to cover the woman's exploitation.»* They still listened attentively without interrupting me. I continued, *«You see how corruption spreads at large and family relations are discarded. It is the result of the freedom of no limits. It starts with shaking hands to end in an intimate love affair. Don't you feel it is an odd situation? You do! But you are afraid of saying your opinions, lest you may be labeled as reactionaries. You stick to such trifles which are the real backwardness. In such an atmosphere, every woman will look for a lover*



*and thus corruption spreads as fire in dry straws. Children of unknown fathers can be seen everywhere. Your girls count the days to be 15 and leave the parents' house and experience life by their own. Can these countless illegal children settled in special homes be considered civilization? What do statistics tell you? Thousands of the aged die in their homes while no one knows about them until bad smelling leak out of their homes».*

When I took a breath, the doctor's wife said: «Don't you think that Muslim men are quite tough on women? Women are locked in their homes. They cannot have jobs and should observe hijab. Is not polygamy a remnant of old ages?»

I said: «Islam forbids whatever leads to situations experienced in your communities. Hijab is woman's shield against men's lusty instincts. It is to spare man the instincts stirred by woman's beauty. It is for the benefit of all humanity.

*Islam does not lock woman in her house. She can have any job or social activity outside her house, but she should observe decent clothes. Our history is rich with such active women in their communities.*

*Moreover, man is also ordered to act decently. The reason for this dispute is my refusal to shake hands with you. It is a religious duty. Similarly, a Muslim woman is not allowed to shake hand with a foreigner.*

*Regarding polygamy, it is allowed under strict conditions to solve social problems suffered by communities such as yours. Your thinkers confess such a truth».* When I finally apologized, I felt a clear change in their attitude. They asked me to spend the night with them but I apologized and was about to leave when they expressed their wish to meet again and have more discussions. I was ready to do that. For more than ten days we met, and I answered all their questions regarding Islam religion. Both were convinced of the sound reasoning and asked how to become Muslims. I said, «Quite simply. There is no baptism, no confession and no sacred bread! Just you utter: There is no god but Allah, and Muhammad is His messenger».

Both of them uttered the clause twice for an accurate pronunciation. I congratulated them and shook the husband's hand, while the wife drew back. I taught them how to perform ablution, prayers and fasting and promised to provide them with Islamic literature. I gave the doctor's wife an Islamic dress as a gift. Both of them today propagate Islam in America.



## Antoine Ja'ja:

### The Bible Calls to Islam

Ja'ja (Mustafa) is a graduate from a French University. He is from the city of Bshirry (Lebanon). He is a Christian who converted to Islam. He read the Old Testament and the new one, and after reading The Holy Quran, he became a Muslim enjoying spiritual tranquility and rest, though his kin and kith turned away from him. A local newspaper interviewed him recently.

#### Q: When and how did you acquire Islamic ideology?

A: I am proud of being of the people of The Book. The Bible was the first book that linked me to Islam and to The Quran. I read The Quran and pondered on the Quranic verse that reads: *{Those who follow the Apostle, the Prophet, the Ummi (unlearned) whom they find written (in their scriptures) with them in the Torah and the Ingil; (who) enjoins unto them (what is) good and prevents them from evil...}* [A'araf: 157].

I made a thorough investigation in the Divine Books that preceded The Holy Quran. I found that the Islamic religion is actually the religion of all prophets and apostles. Prophet Jesus (a.s.) was sent with the mission of The Lord. He says: *{For I have not spoken of myself, but of the Father (Lord) Who sent me, He gave me commandment, what I should say and what I should speak.}* [John: 12/49].

The Bible clearly calls to Islam, the religion of Prophet Ibrahim (a.s.) who was a monotheist.

#### Q: When did you start such investigation?

A: I became a Muslim after profound studying of the Torah and David Psalms. In 1993 and 1994, I made a comparative study of the holy Books and The Holy Quran. I found that The Quran completes and verifies the preceding Divine Books.

Prophet Muhammad's (P.B.U.H.) message is a perfection of the preceding religions. The Holy Quran says: *{...This day I have perfected for you, your religion and have completed My favor on you and chosen for you Islam (to be) the religion.}* [Al-Maidah :3].

#### Q: You are a Christian from the Maroni sect; how could you overstep the sectarian factor flourishing in Lebanon?

A: I believe in religion not in sects. I am proud of my Christian background. The Holy Quran mentions all the prophets and apostles including Prophet Muhammad (P .B.U.H.). The Quran says: *{Say (O' Muhammad!) O, you people, surely I am the messenger of Allah unto you all...}* [Al-A'araf; 158].

I found that the message of Islam addresses all people. Hence I had the right to become a Muslim. I do not claim that I changed from one religion to another, but that I found the right path. I was on the wrong track; then, I found the right one.

I became a Muslim following Prophets Muhammad and Jesus (Peace be upon them both). I believe in Christianity as a doctrine, and I find a lot that leads to Islam in the Bible.

**Q: Your major is psychology; how did you feel before embracing Islam and how do you feel now?**

A: Psychologically, I have thoroughly changed. I was pessimistic, hesitant, lost, and alien to my own self. Now I am optimistic and firm in belief. Previously, I had to choose one of three: to be a heretic, to commit suicide, or to embrace Islam. I preferred the third option. Following the west scientific development one cannot be a heretic.

Science proves the existence of a creator. To commit suicide means to displease Allah. I embraced Islam.

**Q: Are you influenced by famous intellectuals who embraced Islam in France such as Maurice Bucaille and Rojer Garaudy?**

A: I was greatly influenced by those famous men, especially Bucaille who was stunned by the Quranic verse that reads: {...*And say: O' my Lord! Increase me in knowledge*} [Taha: 114].

No other religion but Islam demands one to increase one's knowledge. Man is at the threshold of a new century; still increase in scientific knowledge is demanded.

It is logic and reasoning that led me to embrace Islam. I did not blindly follow one of the present trends, nor did I flatter Muslims for some personal interest in marriage or divorce. I found the scientific factor in The Quran. They are scientific miracles in the age of science and knowledge.

**Q: What was the reaction in your own locality?**

A: Naturally, they rejected my new attitude. I suffered hardship and social harassment. I became a stranger in my family and amid my friends. But I consider myself an immigrant from one religion to another. Today I live amid the Muslims.

**Q: The majority of Muslims are not committed Muslims; how were you attracted to Islam?**

A: I was attracted to Islam through its clear reasonable logic and concepts that can be enacted. There is nothing secret or ambiguous in Islam. Islam's practical instructions are clear to both: the common people and intellectuals. No one is humiliated or despised in this religion. There are no complicated or ecclesiastical rituals. No one has the authority to forgive the sinners. Allah the Almighty is only the One Who forgives. Islam is religion of reason and convincing argument. The Holy Quran says:

*{But if they dispute with you (O' Muhammad), then say: I have submitted myself (wholly) to Allah and so does everyone who follows me}* [Al-Umran: 19].

*{And they say: 'None shall enter Paradise except him who is a Jew or a Christian.' Say (O, Muhammad to them): Bring your proof if you are truthful.}* [The Cow: 111].

Islam is the religion of dialogue. A Muslim feels certain of the Creator hence enjoys spiritual tranquility.

The Holy Quran says: *{And those who believe and their hearts are set at rest by God's remembrance; certainly by God's remembrance are the hearts set at rest.}* [Al-Ra'd:28].

Islam is different from other religions in such features in addition to its demand of one to seek knowledge. Moreover, Islam does not stifle the natural instincts of the human being. We are today at the age of stirred instincts through media propaganda. Islam is moderate; it does not suppress the instincts. The Prophet (P.B.U.H.) says: *«The believer who lives amid others and is patient at hardship is better than he who isolates himself and is impatient.»* In Islam there is not monasticism that suppresses the instincts Allah created in men to survive the species reproduction. Tribes and nations are created to know each other. The Holy Quran says: *{O' you people, surely We have created you of a male and female and made you in nations and tribes that you may recognize each other; surely the most honored of you to Allah is the one of you who guards (against evil) the most, Allah is All- Knowing All-Aware}* [Al-Hujurat: 13].

#### **Q: Are you active amid Muslims or Christians?**

A: Naturally amid the Muslims. I give lectures, radio interviews, and explain a lot about reasons for my conversion to Islam. I refer to the scientific miracles in The Quran and confirm its authenticity vis-à-vis the distorted Bibles.

#### **Q: You do not address Christians, do you?**

A: No, I do not, but I do call them to seek authentic information related to the Prophet (P.B.U.H.) in their Bibles. The Deuteronomy 18: 18 says:

*{I will raise them up a Prophet from among their brethren like unto thee (Moses - having a father and a mother) and will put My words in his mouth and he shall speak unto them all that I shall command him.}*

Isaiah 2:12 says:

*{And the Book (The Quran) is delivered to him that he is not learned saying: Read this, I pray thee, and he says: I am not learned.}*

#### **Q: Do you consider Islam as a perfect religion encompassing all previous religions? Can it play a role at the international level?**

A: Of course I do. The Quranic verse 3 chapter Al-Maidah confirms this fact. Other religions need Islam so that they may be refined of all distortion.

Islam can be a unique school for science and culture. The renowned writer George Bernard Show says: *«If a man like Muhammad were to assume leadership of the modern world, he would succeed in solving its problems and bring peace and happiness.»*

## MRS. BERNICE HOLTON

Mrs. Bernice Holton is a British biologist who embraced Islam more than twenty years ago. She married a committed Muslim scientist and has three children. In an interview with a local magazine, Mrs. Holton speaks about her early inclination toward religion in general and Islam in particular. Following is the text of her interview.

### **Q: Kindly tell us how were you attracted to Islam?**

A: As a child, I attended the church as is usual for Christian families to do. Then I became a teacher in the church; however, the teaching and the contents of the Bible did not convince me. Hence I left the church and turned to other religions, such as Hinduism, Buddhism... and Islam as well. The problem in the West is that one reads about Islam in books that cannot tell the true meanings in Islam. Writers play with words to distort information. I gave up thinking of religion. Then in college, I saw people from all over the world. Some were Muslims, and I asked them about Islam. At that time, the Muslims and the Arabs were ridiculed in the magazines and newspapers. They were portrayed as being silly and stupid, and it was said that one Jew could mislead a thousand Arabs.

However, when I talked with true Muslims, they furnished me with good, reasonable information which proved them to be clever and intelligent. I asked for books written in English by British Muslims. I never thought of becoming a Muslim woman, because I knew my family, friends, and co-workers would oppose me and create trouble for me. Hence I put away all the Islamic books in a place where I could not get them easily. Yet I could not tolerate the situation and hurried to get them back. I accepted Islam after I received my college degree. I got a job in Toronto... It was not easy for me to work with Jews, Christians, etc. They mocked my new belief, but I used to tolerate their behavior and talked to them sociably.

When I started to fast, I could not arrange the times for eating: Iftar and suhur (eating after sunset and before dawn). When I suffered poor health, my colleagues hurried to get me a doctor and from that time on, they were so nice to me that they even supplicate me on fasting days with chocolates or biscuits at the time of eating. They are still my good friends.

### **Q: What is your opinion regarding women's freedom in the West and Muslim women in the Muslim community?**

A: Women have gained some freedom in recent years. They have entered all fields of knowledge. The West talks a lot about freedom but never talks about duties and obligations. For women, it is good to study and achieve social status. Women can work as doctors, engineers, and in business. The problem is not to work or not outside the home. The problem is that she is being cheated, misled, and sexually abused. In this regard you can see the article of Dr. Frances Conley published in «Time» No. 27, July 1991.

In a capitalist society, companies compete for the highest profits for their products. Now who is to buy their products? Of course, men, women, and children. Women also take the husband's money for their own use. Here the companies encourage women to buy even useless items. Women, in turn, try to find the latest fashions, cosmetics, furniture, luxurious cars... They think

about how to spend the evening and where. The company's profits increase. In the West, nothing is encouraged if it is not profitable. As a result, immorality and deviation spread, families break down, and children suffer psychological damage. Women also suffer. This is the result of the media campaigns which don't differentiate between reasonable freedom and interference in one's obligation...

In regard to a Muslim woman wherever she lives, she suffers hardships in her community. Even those who agree with her decent (Islamic) clothes (*hijab*) find it difficult to have her at work. She faces difficulties in bringing up her children in an environment where the schools (usually with secularist curriculums), the T.V. programs, and the media teach them something in contrast with their belief. Hence the Muslim mother must be aware of Islamic ethics (ideology) and must know that which is forbidden and that which is not forbidden.

**Q: How can a true Muslim woman play a positive role in a Muslim community?**

A: Every person can play such a role. A woman can have such a role if she brings up her children according to Islamic instructions. Speaking for myself, I like reading scientific and social books as well as books about environment. I like very much to join organizations caring for the disabled. I think disabled people throughout the world are in great need of help. The work with the disabled may not seem fruitful since improvement is not always obvious... However, in Third World countries, we see few organizations caring for them. Everyone is concerned with his own affairs. In the results of the territorial wars, one can see thousands of helpless citizens.

The disabled may not suffer from a missing leg or hand. He may suffer from a mental disorder, a bullet in the liver, etc. The disabled often feel they are a burden to their families, and they may develop other sicknesses. Organizations can be of great help. We are all supposed to demonstrate sympathy, compassion, and help towards those who need it.

## THE CANADIAN MUSLIM MUSSA F.

**The Canadian brother Mussa F. embraced Islam and wrote his story to Noor Al Islam Magazine.**

My name is Moussa but it was not always Moussa, and, in fact, it still isn't but I prefer to remain anonymous in telling you about myself for family reasons that will become obvious later on in my story.

I was born in a normal middle class European family, and I had a normal middle class upbringing with no particular problems other than the usual problems which any western family experiences. My parents did their best to make sure that I had a good education, the usual toys, Christmas presents, outings, and holidays away from home etc. that other children around me had.

Religion was a subject rarely discussed in my family and was generally confined to marriages, baptisms, and funerals. Islam, although a major influence on the history of humanity in the past to my well-read mother, is now regarded by my parents as a hindrance to modern day progress, an oppressor of the rights of women, and a general all-round source of terrorism, fanaticism, and political problems for the world as a whole. What is worse it is, to them, a strange and foreign religion.

A previous incident in my family, on the subject of religion, has left me in no doubt that my conversion would not be accepted and that it would only lead to division if I told them about it. Thus, although I have been Muslim now for several years, I have not yet dared to tell my family about it, and this has been made easier by the fact that I live far from them. I do phone them regularly and write letters as often as possible: however, visiting them would be a little difficult without them discovering, because of prayers, eating habits etc.

Since the death of my Grandfather, when I was an adolescent, I started to try to talk to God, and the first thing I asked God was to help my Grandfather to get to heaven. Since then I have always believed in God, but it was not until I found myself teaching in an international school in India, several years later, that I first began to question the fact that Christianity might not be the true religion from God.

The question I first asked myself was «*Why did God only give prophets to the Jews and then later to the Christians?*» Did He really leave all the Indians, Africans etc. without a prophet throughout most of their history?»

The answer to this question came to me through a German family I met who were Bahais. They told me that every nation has had its own prophet. They did not, however, tell me, and I don't think they knew that the origin of this valuable piece of information was the Qur'an. (See sourate No. 10 (Younes) verse 47, Sourate No. 19 (Ibrahim) verse 4)

This revelation made a lot of sense to me, and I began to look into other religion's beliefs and to have respect for the Bahais' beliefs to the extent that when asked by a Muslim friend a few years later which religion I liked, I replied that I think the Bahais have the right idea about religion. The Muslim friend seemed very perturbed at this as he asked me what these Bahais believed in. I told him that they believed in lots of different prophets



including Mohammad (P). He said that if they believed in Prophet Mohammad (P) and in The Quran they should be Muslims. When I asked why, he said that in The Quran there is a verse which states that Mohammad is the last Prophet (Sourate 33, verse 40).

I did not, at all, like the idea of being a Muslim as it carried with it many associations of violence, fanaticism, being undemocratic etc. but I decided that, as someone who considers himself to be open minded, I ought at least to read The Quran before making any definite decisions. Upon reading The Quran (in translation), I learnt that the Muslim does not have the right to attack anyone unless he is attacked first, that there is no compulsion in religion, that the best men are the ones who treat women well, that Muslim men and women were encouraged to get an education, that Muslims should give to the poor, and many other things which seemed to be the opposite of how I viewed the behavior of the Muslims of the world at the time.

After stalling as long as I could and getting my Muslim friend and others to verify the translation of the verse about Mohammad (P) being the last Prophet, fear of not following the Prophet whom God wanted me to follow and the realization that Mohammad (P) was that prophet who pushed me to admit to myself that I was a Muslim so I had better start getting used to it.

My first two years as a Muslim were a bit difficult as regards the attitude of the Europeans around me; but then they turned marvelous as I discovered more and more about this totally comprehensive religion which God has given us. And, to my great surprise, not only were the Muslims not at all violent or unfriendly, they were the warmest, friendliest, and certainly the most hospitable community I had ever met, and when they called me their brother you could see that the Islamic idea that all Muslims should consider themselves as members of one family was a powerful sentiment that even the egoism and selfishness of the modern world had not yet managed to eradicate.

Sometimes, I would discover later that those who at first seemed overawed about the fact that I had become a Muslim were in fact not too strict in their practice of the religion, but there was, nevertheless, a definite bond between all Muslims which only someone who had not been Muslim before could fully appreciate. One brother in particular that I met struck up an excellent friendship with me in a very short time and basis for this friendship was our attachment to Islam. However, I noticed that he seemed reluctant to pray with me and always seemed to have an excuse not to do so. Finally, during a discussion about politics, he mentioned that he liked the political system in Iran. «*Just a minute,*» I said, «Are you a Shiite?» I could tell that my brother in Islam was not too comfortable with this question, and to be honest, I was kind of dreading the reply as I had grown to like this particular brother a lot but had serious doubts about the Shiites.

Weren't they the ones who thought that Ali (A.S.) was a prophet instead of Mohammad (P)? My first Muslim friend had told me that he was not sure whether the Shiites were Muslims or not.

«*I prefer Muslim,*» was the reply given by my brother. When I insisted on this point, he said that he was Shiite, and I then asked him what the difference between Sunnis and Shiites was. Already I sensed another few



weeks, possibly months, of heavy reading ahead of me, but I listened intently to everything that he said as I loved this brother a lot, and I did not like this new division which had come between us.

From the very beginning of this latest research, I knew that once again, as with other religions throughout history, politics had reared its ugly head in our religion and had led my brothers in Islam astray but I did not know whether God wanted me to try to put my brother on the right track or whether, in fact, I was the one who would once again have to admit that I had been on the wrong track.

At first, I thought that the division had been created after what I knew to be the four enlightened Caliphs: Abou Bakr, Omar, Othman and Ali (A.S.). In addition, I realized that I could not trust what the Shiite *Hadiths* say to prove the case of the Shiites and that I could not trust what the Sunni *Hadiths* say to prove the case of the Sunnis. I decided to start by reading Sunni books about Ali and the other Caliphs.

My first book was a Sunni book about the life of Ali (A.S.). Although it did not mention any of the Ghadeer *Hadiths* it did mention that Ali was to Mohammad «as Haroun was to Moussa». I also noted that before the battle of Siffin, Ali said to Mu'awiya's messenger «*I had a problem with Abou Bakr, Omar, and Othman as I believed the Caliphate to be my right*'' - a statement which he also made, according to another Sunni book about Abou Bakr, six months after the beginning of Abou Bakr's rule and thirty years before the battle of Siffin.

No research into Sunni *Hadiths* would be complete without a look at the collection of Boukhari's *Hadiths* and the local Sunni imam helped me in this by pointing out the section which is about the qualities of the Prophet's companions. After reading three pages about Abou Bakr, two pages about Omar, one page about Othman, and one page on how Aisha was the best, favorite wife of the Prophet and the mother of the believers, I finally came across three *Hadiths* about Ali. The first was about how he didn't like a certain nickname that people gave him. The second was: «*I (Prophet Mohammad (P)) am the city of knowledge, and Ali (A.S.) is its gate*».

And the last was the one about Ali (A.S.) being to the Prophet (P) as Haroun was to Moussa.

There was also a footnote which suggested that one should be suspicious of any *Hadiths* about Ali.

Later, I discovered Sunni *Hadiths* such as:

«*Ali is the leader of all believers after me*'.» (Attirmidhi vol 5, Page 296).

«*Whosoever accepts me as leader must also accept Ali, may God protect his followers and defeat his enemies*» (Muslim vol 2, Page 362) etc.

I also read many *Hadiths* and parts of the Qur'an which refer to Ahlul Beit.

But I loved this person called Ali (A.S.) from the very first book I read about him. I loved the way he tried, to the end, to do what he believed to be right even though it seemed that everyone was against him. I know that, in politics, those who win are usually the most corrupt, and I certainly did not like this character called Mu'awiya who seemed to me to be in search of political power above all. Also if Ali (A.S.) was the gate to the city of

knowledge, how could he not know that Abou Bakr, Omar, and Othman were the best men for the job of caliphate after the Prophet's (P) death?

Once again I realized that I had to change tack, and once again I was worried in case the people around me would take it badly. But my fears were unfounded as the Sunnis in my community who were on the whole very good and serious Muslims accepted my change of opinion and direction in a brotherly way. They tried to convince me that I was wrong at the beginning (the imam even spent ten weeks talking about the qualities of the Prophets' companions), but when they saw that I had done a lot of research they said *Alhamdulillah* you are Muslim. I continued going to the same mosque until I eventually left again to work in Pakistan, and both my Shiite Muslim brother and my first Muslim brother still treat me as if I were their real brother, and they are both like brothers to each other.

I plan to tell my parents of my conversion to Islam when I get married in the hope that this would be easier for them to accept on such an occasion. Please say some prayers for my family as well as my new found brothers and sisters in Islam.

## Spanish Sister:

**Yolanda Martin (Zeinab)**

- *With Islam I got rid of the psychological and ideological unrest that had haunted me.*
- *I was guided and wore Hijab in a hostile milieu, never cared about wealth or offensive remarks.*

It is the journey from doubt to certainty, the journey of questions and constant search for the truth, the goal of the wise who seek it everywhere. How can the one who has a sound nature and an interrogative mind go astray? Here is Sister Yolanda Martin driven by her questions to the land of Islam. She has left her relatives and country to enjoy a life with her Muslim family in her husband's homeland, Lebanon.

**Q. Before talking about the reasons that made you embrace Islam, we would like you first to give us a glance about your childhood and the place where you grew up?**

A. I was born in Granada (Spain). I was the second child in a Catholic humble family whose faith was innate; that is the Catholic Church and its teachings meant nothing to them, because they observed sublime values and morals. Perhaps this was an indirect element in my inclination to the Islamic faith that always concentrates on high ethics and sound behavior.

**Q. What about the Spanish society today?**

A. As for the Spanish society in which I lived, it is one ruled by immoral disintegration and absurdity that drive the youth to lead lives of debauchery; they spend their time in nightclubs, drink alcohol, use drugs, and have illicit sexual affairs, including homosexual ones. All this takes place under the banner of personal freedom which the Western materialistic civilization calls for. This also leads the youth not to care about the marriage institution which they view as a chain and restriction of freedom.

However, these atmospheres in my motherland have not influenced me due to the decent upbringing I had received in my family.

**Q. Has the intellectual atmosphere in the school or in the university had an effect as far as you choosing the Islamic faith is concerned?**

I studied in Catholic schools from the age of three until I was 17. Education in those schools was good, and the teachers and the administration took care of students. As for religious teachings, they were restricted to Lady Mary (a.s.) hymns and going to church on Sundays to listen to some sermons given by the priest during Mass. But those sermons were superficial and monotonous, so they could not draw anyone's attention. We did not get any in-depth knowledge in the teachings of the Gospel. This has cast doubts within me concerning Christian beliefs.

When I became 14, I quitted going to church on Sundays because I saw that that was useless.

Two years before I went to college, the Religion teacher asked the following question: What is the difference between Christ (a.s.) and the rest of the prophets? I concluded that there was no difference, that he was a

prophet just like the other prophets, and that he was not the son of God. These questions and conclusions were the beginnings of my actual interest in the issue of faith and the hereafter.

**Q. When did you embrace Islam, and what was the reaction of your family and the people around you?**

A. When I was 17, I met Muslims from different nationalities: Morocco, Lebanon, and Iran. This happened as I frequented cafes that do not sell liquor. Muslim students went to those cafes where serious discussions on faiths took place. At this stage, I read the Gospel thoroughly along with a number of Islamic books about Islam and its teachings. I used to raise all the questions on Islam that came to my mind and discuss them with the Muslim people I met. At that time, I also began to take interest in the history of my town that had wide fame during the era of the Islamic State in Andalusia. I knew that most of its people were Muslims before it was regained by Catholic kings in 1492, and that those kings annihilated Muslims and forced who remained alive to embrace Christianity.

As time passed and after a lot of inspection and contemplation, I became certain that Islam was the final heavenly message and that its magnanimous teachings get along with human nature besides being good for every time and place, for Islam came for life in this world and the hereafter. I realized that I have become a Muslim, and I was convinced that Allah has guided me to the Right Faith.

Afterwards, I began to frequent the Islamic Center in Granada where lectures on Islam were given; there I met my husband who gave lectures on Ethics and Fiqh (jurisprudence) in the center although he was a Medicine student.

**Position of Family and Society**

At first, I did not tell my family that I had become a Muslim, but they noticed that something within me has changed. In the beginning, I did not dare to wear *hijab* for fear of their reaction. I used to wear it when I went to the Islamic Center and when I visited my Muslim friends. After that, I used to keep it on everywhere except for the neighborhood where I lived. However, my parents knew about that from the neighbors. My father did not oppose my conversation to Islam saying that I had the right and freedom to choose the faith I wanted; and so did my mother, but at first she opposed my wearing the *hijab*, especially as she had been subjected to enormous pressures, for the audiovisual media fights Islam violently, and the Spanish society can take everything, even the worst immoral acts, so if you are a Muslim it means that you are a terrorist, reactionary, besides the other false charges leveled against Muslims in an expression of hatred.

As for my sister, she got very angry and was ashamed to walk with me because I wore the Islamic attire, but now she understands me and respects my decision.

As for the other people in the neighborhood, they chattered a lot and made offensive remarks, but I did not care.

In the university where I studied nursing, I faced no problem with the students or the administration, for they respected my will to do what I did.

Then I worked as a nurse in a public hospital for ten years with no problem worth mentioning.

**Q. What are the positive things that happened to you after you had embraced Islam at the personal level and as far as your relationships with others are concerned?**

A. At the personal level, I feel considerable relief; my thoughts are now clear, and so is my goal in life. I got rid of the intellectual and psychological unrest that had haunted me before I converted to Islam. I have landed on a safe shore. I thank Allah that my family has accepted my conversion to Islam.

As for my relationships with people in motherland, they are limited. I get in touch with those who respect my Islam. I don't care about those who are malicious towards Islam.

**Q. What is your opinion about hijab and what some people say about it and how it is being fought?**

A. Some people view *hijab* as a minor issue that should not be given all this interest and believe that it should not be observed. But in truth *hijab* is protection for the Muslim woman. It is a defense line for her as it forces her to take care of her actions, movements, choice of places she frequents, and selection of friends; so it prevents her from being absorbed by atmospheres that are far from religion and morals.

**Q. What is the best way to invite people to Islam in your opinion?**

A. The best way to do this is by action not words. A Muslim must be a model of the good human being in his country and society. His Islam must be a reflection of his good deeds.

**Q. What are you doing now? Do you encourage non-Muslims to embrace Islam?**

A. Currently I live in Lebanon with my husband and children, for it is difficult to raise the children in a non-Islamic society because they spend long time outside the house which makes them subject to being absorbed by Spanish society that is hostile to Islam and because a human being always tries to be like the group among which he lives in order to guarantee that they accept him.

As for inviting people to Islam, this is the duty of every Muslim. I reiterate, the best way to do this is by action not words.

**Q. Is there a chance for inviting people to Islam in you motherland?**

A: Chances are not null, but there is considerable difficulties to do so in light of the power of the anti-Islam media. This requires doubled efforts from those working in this regard.

Nevertheless, what is more important than this is that Muslims in Spain preserve their Islam and that of their children preventing them from melting into the Spanish society. This can be achieved only through opening Islamic

schools and centers so that these children can be taught the teachings and values of Islam besides academic courses.

## Russian Converted Sister

### Dagina Kirkoz

● *My conversion to Islam is reflected as psychological tranquility which I have known after I began to communicate with Allah, a gift I had not been enjoying before that.*

● *The Muslim woman must be aware and cautious in order not to be turned into merchandise by the media.*

● *I hope that all Muslims show the pure image of Islam which is being fought ferociously by its enemies.*

You can feel transparency, sincerity and tranquility as she talks about her conversion to Islam... Dagnia Kirkoz, who was born in Latvia, is one of those who have joined the convoy of Divine Light: she is reassured and satisfied thanking Allah - praised be His name - Who has guided her to Islam.

She did not suffice herself with the Nursing Diploma from the University of Latvia; she felt it was necessary for her to learn Arabic; the language of the Quran and Islam, although she is a mother of two girls.

She has felt the overwhelming desire to acquire knowledge of the bases of her faith and its rulings, so she is attending Arabic classes in an institute in Beirut.

### **Q. How many members are there in your family? And how was your relationship with them before you embraced Islam?**

A. My family includes my father, mother, and my elder sister. My parents worked all day long, and sometimes at night. This made my sister and me shoulder the household responsibilities. Our parents' long absence from the house made our emotional ties to them cold, although my mother tried to be close to us urging us to learn, acquire culture, and engage in school activities.

### **Q. Were there specific values that ruled in your town?**

A. We were brought up in the small town of Madonna Latvia. Although the town was small, individualism governed the residents' lives; everyone lived in semi-isolation. There were a lot of quarrels among family members due to the parents' using alcohol and the resulting terrible fights that usually end up in divorce and family disintegration.

### **Q. It is known that the communist regime has left its marks on the intellectual and cultural life in the former USSR. To what extent did this affect your educational milieu?**

A. This is true. The communist regime's ideology influenced the intellectual and cultural life, including the educational system. The political regime had activities in all schools and universities. You had to join the party's scouts, or you would be looked at with suspicion and caution.

However, my mother believed in Christianity. She used to take us to church, and we felt threatened by the regime for going there. Communist thoughts found their way into my sister's mind, so she started to contradict my mother's faith and thoughts, and my mother started to listen secretly to anti- USSR radio stations.



**Q. What are the circumstances that led you to embrace Islam?**

A. My attention was drawn by the Muslim students, and how they dealt with others politely and ethically. Besides, they were serious in studying, and they undertook the responsibilities of their alienation and schooling with seriousness contrary to the other young men and women in the university who indulged in the life's pleasures.

It also drew my attention that they did not use alcohol or go to notorious night clubs. My husband was one of them. I admired Islam more as I - along with my family - saw how he treated me and all those around him in line with Islamic ethics.

My husband was the wide door through which I entered Islam, for he answered all my questions about this new faith. He has convinced my mind and not only my emotion.

**Q. What were the reactions in your community to your conversion to Islam?**

A. When my relatives knew that I had been married to a Muslim, they felt pity for me thinking that I would face a doomed fate. However, there were others who respected my decision. My parents were pleased with my marriage, for they rejected atheism and my faith in Allah - praised be His name - meant a lot to them since they rejected the communist ideology. They admired Islam more as they saw how my husband treated me - in line with Allah's orders - politely, patiently and kindly.

As for my friends, they thought I was forced to embrace Islam and wear *hijab*, because they believed that *hijab* lowers the woman and makes her a maid and prisoner of her husband. They did not believe that my husband had not forced me to do anything, and that my acts were the result of my full conviction.

**Q. What were the positive results of your conversion to Islam?**

A. The major thing that was reflected on my life after my conversion to Islam was the psychological tranquility that I have known since I began to communicate with Allah - be He exalted - through my religious duties. I feel great relief when I perform the prayer or fast. I have found myself in a social life that is remote from individualism for Islam invites us to visit our relatives and neighbors and to check if they have any problems be it in good times or bad times.

**Q. Do you suggest specific means to invite non-Muslims to Islam in light of your experience?**

A. The enemies of Islam are using all their resources to distort the image of Islam. That is why you find that ordinary non-Muslims are afraid of Islam. Therefore, those who seek to serve this monotheist faith need to show its reality and clear its image through satellite channels and internet in foreign languages as much as possible.

**Q. After you came to Lebanon, have you ever returned to Latvia, and has the position of your relatives and friends remained the same?**

A. I have visited my motherland. My relatives and friends were greatly surprised as they felt that I was happy after I converted to Islam and in my new homeland. I clarified to them a lot of the faith teachings stressing on the social aspects because this side is missing in my town. And as for those who do not enjoy a great deal of thought and education, I chose to speak to them in a simple language that they could understand.

**Q. Is it possible to invite people to Islam in Latvia?**

A. The Latvian state has allowed the Muslim minority to build its first mosque which needs preachers and imams to guide the people, for Muslims in Latvia know only a little about their faith. It is difficult for those people to invite non-Muslims to Islam as those who lack something cannot give it. Thus, it is the duty of the *Ulama* throughout the Muslim world to prepare preachers in Latvia and elsewhere in the world. The Eastern and Western Europeans view Islam with contempt and disdain; the politicians there sense its threat because of its universal message. Therefore, all Muslims have to be concerned with invitation to Islam in word and deed.

**Q. How do you view the Muslim woman in your new homeland, Lebanon?**

A. I see that most of the women here are absorbed by the details of the house chores and do not take interest in what is taking place in the society, although Islam has permitted them to go out of the house, work, and study in a manner that does not contradict their marital or motherhood duties.

The Muslim woman has to be aware and cautious; she must not be attracted by the media that tries to make her a merchandise; she has to acquire knowledge about Islam and finish schooling, because the educated mother is better than the ignorant. Her face is the face of the country, and she is the one supposed to prepare the children, so that they do what pleases Allah - be He exalted.

**Q. Is there a comment that you would like to address to Muslims through the magazine of Noor Al- Islam?**

A: I hope that all Muslims show the pure image of Islam for the faith is being fought ferociously by its enemies. I pray to Allah to remedy the Muslims' inner and outer selves so that the deeds and words become identical, and praise is Allah's, the Lord of the worlds.

## **The American Muslim Sister:**

**Zaynab Shareef**

**Zaynab Shareef «Ann Marie», is pursuing a master's degree in psychology and community counseling, BS in Science, and minor in Biology (with a concentration in education and psychology). She has a Medical Assistant Associate Degree. She works as a Program Director and a Child Care Administrator in the USA.**

### **Q. Why did you embrace Islam?**

A. I was working with refugee children and had not practiced any organized religion since I was 18 years old. I had turned away from my faith because of a deep feeling that it was not right. I believed in God, but I did not believe that Jesus was God. I had been raised as a strict Catholic and had problems with the role of the priest as «*Christ*» on earth. When I met these children and their families I was impressed with the total obligation of faith; it was not something that existed for just one hour per week. It rather was in everything and in every part of the life. Then I bought an English interpretation of the Holy Quran and read Surah al-Rad. This changed me forever and opened my eyes.

### **Q. What about your social environment and upbringing before embracing Islam?**

I was divorced from my husband and am raising two daughters alone. I did not participate in the comings and goings of society. I was dedicated to my daughters and the work that I was doing with children in early childhood education. I was also attending college.

I was raised as a Catholic - a strict Catholic. I grew up next door to a church and lived with my grandmother (who was handicapped from a stroke). I helped her and went to Catholic schools, including an all-girl high school. We were taught to respect ourselves and give our lives to God.

### **Q. How did you embrace Islam? And what was the impact of your embracing of Islam on your milieu?**

A. My family of origin - my mother and my father - has had a hard time still with accepting the change in me. They would be quite happy if I do not cover my head, because then I would blend in with the rest of our society. We are very distant, but they see the strength that this has brought me. I am blessed *Alhamdulillah* to have a good job. I am an administrator at a large child care center for the YMCA. I am free to cover my head and worship as I please. They respect my faith and my observances. It has not always been that way, but someone told me once if I have peace about what I do, so will others. I have had more problems with Muslims who did not revert, judged me harshly, and told me things that were wrong when I first reverted. There is a lot of ugliness in people, and I had to learn to be more assertive in questioning their statements and also to check on the validity of what they were telling me. I sometimes think that those who were handed this faith and this way of life - those who were set on this path at birth - don't understand why we choose it, because they don't understand the beauty in it or can't see the beauty in it and the way of life that the Holy Prophets, the

Imams (May the peace and blessings of Allah be upon them) and The Holy Quran call us to live.

**Q. What are the tangible positive changes in your life since you adopted Islam?**

A. I have found peace inside myself. I have attained greater things. I returned to school to continue my education and have built a stable life (*Inshallah*) for my daughters. I have found peace inside my heart and out. *Alhamdulillah!* I have also learned just how strong I can be when I walk the path of Islam!

**Q. On the personal level, do you feel more peaceful, secure, and relieved?**

A. Yes, *Alhamdulillah*. I am more relieved and I find peace in my prayers, in fasting, and in my practice, and yet, I have so much to learn- so very much! For all that I have learned there is a massive amount I have yet to learn; it is just a molecule in a universe of knowledge. Life is so short, and there is so much to learn!

**Q. On the social relationship level, do you feel the difference between your relations with Muslims and those with non-Muslims in past?**

A. I have met some absolutely faithful people who have walked the path and do it with the grace goodness that should be there. I wish I could say that all the Muslims I have met have been good people, but this a very bad world, and it is easy to be tempted to do wrong and practice «*gheebah*» and other sins. I wish that Muslims were as good as The Quran tells us to be. Non-Muslims respect me more, and so many have been so supportive. *Inshallah*, Allah leads me to more good Muslims and less bad!

**Q. Based on your own experience, do you suggest any specific methods to call non-Muslims to Islam?**

A. Yes, that is possible through practicing what I preach, remembering Allah in all that I do, and remembering what the Prophet Mohammad and the Holy Imams (Allah's blessings on them all) told us to do and how to act and behave! Speak softly, be at peace, and carry a strong faith!

**Q. What is the role you are personally assuming or the role you intend to assume in serving the Islamic Call?**

A. *Inshallah*, I will be the best Muslim I can be. That is all that I wish to be. I am at Allah's beck and call. *Inshallah*, I won't let Him down.

**Q. What are the potentials and prospects of the Islamic Call in your country?**

A. Islam can save my country from the downward slope it is on. It can save us from the base instincts that man has enslaved him to. Islam can pull one back from the brim of hell and lead him to Jannah. But it entails fully surrendering one's self to the will of Allah and to follow the guidance of our Prophet Mohammad and his Ahlul Bayt (peace and blessing on them). It can

be done, and it is up to every Muslim everywhere to live his life as an example on how we can enrich the world through our actions and our submission to the will of Allah and the requirements of our faith. *Alhamdulillah*, Allah has given us a key to heaven; all we have to do is to use it and to work for it in all that we do.

**Q. How do you view Muslims' current state of affairs?**

A. I pray every day in every way that Muslims will live up to the legacy that we have been chosen to carry. *Inshallah*, we will find the courage, the wisdom, and the discipline to follow Prophet Mohammad and his Ahlul Bayt (PBT). But it is hard work, and many are lazy and want to enjoy this life. They sacrifice eternal life for the pleasure in this one, and this will be the doom of our people. Each of us must set the highest standard for ourselves first and for others second. We must sacrifice all that we are for what we can become; but we are so attached to the pleasure of this world that we become easily blinded.

**Q. What is your view to the state of Muslim women?**

A. I teach my daughters that they are precious and that they should not give themselves away a penny at a time. Women should hold what they are: the key to the future and the mothers of tomorrow. They are sacred and should insist on the respect and consideration that is their due. It is up to all Muslim men to protect the women and for women to transcend and become powerful over everything including the ignorance of all the cultures that tend to corrupt the truth and beauty that Allah has told us regarding our roles as providers, as harbors of life, love, comfort, and joy.

## Swedish Muslim Sister

**Dr. Sumayya Parnilla** says:

Godly favor has been bestowed upon me and put me on the path of Allah's genuine religion.

Islam is the religion of justice and logic. It gives space for free intellectual debate and renders balance for the different aspects of human life.

● *I call on the Muslim woman, especially in the Islamic countries to consider her veil as a fortress for her and commitment to religion as the way for her future advancement. I also call on her not to be tempted by the fake Western civilization.*

Sweden is a country, like other Western countries, in which Islam has succeeded, for its power of persuasion, to polarize to its ranks more and more people who had the opportunity to know some about its concepts and regulations.

This truth is being clearly revealed and asserted by the story of Dr. Sumayya Parnilla with Islam and how she was deeply attracted to this religion because of the clarity of its beliefs and principles and the comprehensiveness of its message. According to her, this represented the salvation of the spiritual voidness she suffered from and further gave her the serenity and incentive to get involved in many of the social and intellectual activities to help the Muslims in the locality where she lives and preach Islam across the Swedish territories.

In the presence of her Algerian husband Jamil and her four children, «Noor Al-Islam» met with Dr. Parnilla in her house in «Chanling». Among her children was her daughter, the only one who wears a veil (*Hijab*) in her class, and she is proud about it.

After she welcomed us, the interview started:

### **Q. How would you describe your journey of converting to Islam?**

A. In fact, I believe that godly grace has been bestowed upon me and put me on the true path of Allah's genuine religion, which Almighty Allah has chosen for the mankind to reach salvation. This is the true religion for every time and place.

My journey of becoming a Muslim started at the beginning of the eighties of the last century. It was not an easy or hasty trip. It took me plenty of time to study and contemplate before I took the happy decision to be a Muslim and be committed to its preaching and regulations and to publicly announce that. And this took place only after I was fully convinced about this crucial decision. If you want more details about the way I got acquainted to Islam, after thanking Allah, thanks are due to my sister Maryam whom I grew up with in Siffle (our village). She had chosen to study at one of the Chinese universities. Because of the ideological vacuum she was living, she wanted to know more about Buddhism. But thanks to Allah, instead of Buddhism, she was led to Islam. She met a group of Muslim students who used to study at the same university. She knew Islam through them, so she was persuaded and announced being a Muslim, and

later she got married to one of the Egyptian students. When my sister came back to Sweden, I had lengthy discussions with her about Islam which made me feel relieved and rekindled my thinking about religious and spiritual life. This pushed me further to seek more knowledge about Islam. Then I had meetings with some Muslim intellectuals who gave me clarifications and supplied me with many books that gave me convincing answers about my questions. And as such, I discovered that Islam is the religion of logic, justice, and reason, the religion that maintains balance between reason and sentiments and all other aspects of human life, and the religion that provides man with happiness in this life and the Hereafter and secures him with outstanding solutions.

**Q. How was your parents' and community's reaction towards your commitment to Islam?**

A. Before I wore the veil, my family's and friends' reaction was limited to confusion. They were waiting to see how long I will stay on my new beliefs, and whether it is a deeply entrenched belief or a superficial commitment. But after my marriage, I went with my husband Jamil to Algeria, and there I put on the veil. After my return to Sweden, I faced a wave of questions. Then, I had meetings with and objections from my family and friends as no one of them could have expected that I will be deeply attached as I was because they knew me before as someone who is indifferent about religion matters. They had never thought even for once that Islam is different, and that it is not just a religion that deals with the individual internality but it rather is a way for life.

Wearing the *hijab* (veil), I became in their eyes part of the Muslim minorities whom the Swedish avoid. It is in the Swedish people nature to be isolationist and afraid of the new and the different. However, this did not set me back, and I continued my way with patience and confidence, and I was able to gain respect for me and for what I represent among many of those who complained at the beginning.

**Q. How do you assess the importance of the hijab (veil) for the Muslim women, especially in the West?**

A. In my opinion, the veil represents a fortress in which woman lives confident and self-assured. It gives the woman enough space to think of what is more important than clothing and ornaments. It also gives her the opportunity to direct her efforts to make advancements in her environment and to liberate herself from the greediness and triviality of the fashion market and the corruption of the commercials and media that control clumsy women in today's world.

**Q. Could you brief us about your academic level and the academic field of your work?**

A. After I believed in Islam, I continued my studies until I received my Ph.D. in human environment from Lound University. My thesis was «*Muslim in the Middle East*»; this is my area of interest. This requested my visits to many Islamic countries in the Middle East to gather information about this issue, and I work now as a researcher in the same university.



**Q. We knew that you have many Islamic activities; what are they?**

A. I was elected as a member in the «*Islamic Academy*», an association that includes all Muslim graduates in Sweden. The association is further involved in preaching about Islam to clarify its image in the Swedish community through a series of lectures, symposiums, books and publications, and I do as much as I can to contribute to these activities.

My basic Islamic activity is through the Women Club in Lound and the Islamic Guidance Association for Swedish and Immigrant Muslim Women. The association advocates a policy of Islamic culture enlightenment by teaching religious issues, Islamic studies, and Arabic. It further holds seminars and organizes visits for schools and universities to preach about Islam. In addition, we pay special attention for children so as to help bring them up in an Islamic way and keep them away from the corrupt surrounding.

**Q. What do you think about the future of the new Islamic generation in Sweden and the Western societies?**

A. In my opinion, Muslim children will face fewer problems with the Western societies because it is easier for them to understand and adapt to the society they were brought up in, contrary to the elderly immigrants in Sweden or in other countries.

**Q. What are the problems Muslims face in Sweden?**

A. *First*, the low educational level, as the majority of them came to Sweden to benefit from the luxurious life here, a thing which hinders them having senior jobs.

*Second*, the internal problems among the Muslim groups themselves and the conflict they have regarding their Islamic reference (marjaiyya) that has the final say in their matters.

**Q. How do the Swedish and Westerners view the Muslims living with them?**

A. **Muslims in the West are classified into two categories:**

The first category is called extremists, and those are represented by Muslims who stick to their religious principles and rituals. The second category is called moderates, and those represent those who do not care about their religious duties and live like Westerners. Nonetheless, the Westerners have a negative view about Islam and Muslims as a result of the difference in religions and civilization. Moreover, the guided anti-Islamic Media works so badly to distort their image and over exaggerate the fantasy of Islamic danger on the West. And we do not have to forget the Muslim immigrants' mistakes which give a bad image about them and what they represent.

However, this does not mean that there is no sympathy or understanding for Muslims and Islamic matters in certain circles in the West. Here comes the responsibility of those working for Islam to exert more efforts to widen the positive perspective about Islam in the West.

**Q. Is there a final word you want to say?**

A. I want to convey a concise call through your honorable magazine to Muslim women and all women in the Islamic countries. I want to invite them to understand the profound message of Islam and adhere deeply to the Islamic principles so they would contribute to the unity and advancement of their societies and keep them away from the corruption that devastate the Western societies which degrade human beings. I call upon them not to be tempted with the appearances of the Western life and its fake freedom because this would only lead into their destruction and the destruction of the capabilities Islam has secured for them and their societies. I call upon those who were wrongly fascinated and abandoned their Islamic traits to rethink about themselves and face the truth with sincerity and determination.

## British Muslim Brother John Hanz

«**Mohammed Ali**» says:

- *The clean and straight behavior of some Muslim observing workers has made me revere Islam and want to embrace it.*
- *In the West, we dream about happiness but never find it as we encounter grief and regret after the end of any joy we get.*
- *I have dedicated myself to Islamic Religious Studies to save myself and to guide my family and society.*
- *The Greater Prophet (P.B.U.H) and his purified family (A.S.) are the teachers and leaders of humankind; we must take them as examples.*

As materialistic philosophies and atheistic currents spread and invade the media in every country while backed by the most sophisticated means of communication and publication, a group of people finds its clear straight path amidst the accumulating dust and congestion of ideologies and doctrines, guided by the light of Islam which attracts to its arena a lot of those upon whom Allah has bestowed the grace of the True Religion - Islam. From the heart of the West which has turned its back to religion and the Divine Path at the beginning of the scientific renaissance which has given the west materialistic welfare but failed to lead it to the courtyard of tranquility or the oasis of happiness in this worldly existence besides the hereafter, we begin talking about this rightly guided group with the conversion to Islam of British young man John Hanz. This glimpse summarizes the interview Noor Al-Islam Magazine had with this rightly guided young man.

We have met him in the courtyard of Lady Zeinab's honorable shrine in the suburbs of Damascus. In the evening, following the performance of the blessed visit rituals and the prayers, his face came into sight from among those good faces that came to the honorable shrine. With a bright visage and a nice smile, he looked interesting with his religion-student garment. After we greeted and welcomed him, we had the following dialogue.

### Q: Could you tell us about your early life?

A: With pleasure. I was born in a British community. I lived my childhood as any Christian individual who goes with his family to church on Sundays and Holidays. I had not felt that anything could occur in my life and change it.

Our life was monotonous. We dreamt about happiness but never found it; we did a lot of searching but could not find happiness in the limits of the worldly existence joys. On the contrary, we encountered grief and regret as every joy we have obtained ended. That is why we lived a life at the end of which our existence vanished. A lot of young men, therefore, have opted to get rid of this empty life either via resorting to drugs, as a temporary solution, or by committing suicide. It has happened that many young men took their lives after they read German novelist Goethe's tale The Sorrows of Young Werther. At that period I was not different from any of my peers. I studied in England and graduated as an engineer from the university before I left England to work overseas.

**Q: Would you tell us about your experience under the wing of Islam?**

A: The beginning of the change in my life occurred when I traveled to work in Pakistan. During my stay there, I used to observe the simple workers who worked under my supervision. I noticed their faithfulness in work, honesty in dealing with others, and devotion to perform what they are told to do with extreme respect and politeness. I noted that the reason behind this was the spirit of discipline and the atmosphere of purity that they had gained through good habits. They used to stand up uniformly for prayers a few times a day after they had cleaned their bodies in water tanks, washing or wiping members of their bodies in a clear indication of the body purity and an implicit one of the spirit's cleanliness and soul's purification. I have learned from them the saying of the Apostle (p.b.u.h.), «*The best of all perfumes is water.*» As for us, of what good are the perfumes worn by a human being on a body that is full of dirt and impurities, such as dead meat, pork and the like? Moreover, I have learned from these workers how to fill my time with useful things and organize the hours of the day after I stand up, like them, in submission and say the same words that filled my soul with security and tranquility.

Due to this, I have realized that a Muslim individual represents materialistic purity, in his clean body, and the cleanliness of his soul from sins.

**Q: Was there another reason that made you embrace Islam?**

A: As I said earlier, we, the Westerners suffered a huge vacuum due to the lack of values in the life of the western human being. This causes anxiety which leads, in turn, to the suffering of the soul.

I had not believed there was a creed that brought tranquility and stability to man until I saw with my eyes, heard with my ears, and made sure of the unchallenged fact that tolerant Islam is the safe resort and oasis sought by the souls that look for happiness. The great change in my life was when I learnt about the Final Message, the Essence of Faiths, and the True Religion, Islam. It was an absolute blessing bestowed on me by the care of the Merciful.

**Q: What are the reasons that led you to become a seminary student?**

A: When I was guided to Islam, I thought about my family and society. I knew they would oppose my decision, so I wanted to be armed with evidence and proof. The way to obtain these is science and knowledge; therefore, I decided to learn Islamic sciences and knowledge.

**Q: Doesn't wearing religion-student garment cause you any embarrassment?**

A: Basically, I haven't thought about saving myself only; I wanted to save my countrymen. That is why I anticipated difficulties. I'm proud of wearing the turban and the religion-student garment, for these loose clothes give me freedom of movement and liberate me from the skin-tight clothing

which pressures and annoys me. The Muslim attire is a symbol for abandoning the fake civilization in adornment and beautification.

Besides, the western society claims to be free and democratic; therefore, I have the right to wear what I want.

**Q: What do you plan to do when you return to your country?**

A: Based on what Imam Ali (A.S.) has said: «*Wish to others what you wish to yourself.*» I want good for my brethren in humanity in my motherland for Imam Ali (A.S.) has also said, «*Know that people are either a brother of yours in faith or a creature just like yourself.*» Consequently, I will perform my duty of Islamic invitation, and I hope they will respond positively.

**Q: How informed are you about Islamic knowledge?**

A: I have sought in passion and love to learn about Islamic knowledge and sciences. I am acquainted with the lives of the Prophet (P.B.U.H.) and the Imams (A.S.) besides what they have said and done. I believe that they are the infallible teachers and leaders of humankind. I follow their lead; their sayings are my slogans, and their acts are examples to me.

**Q: Is there anything you want to tell the readers at the end of the interview?**

A: I affirm that I have found a value for life after I had embraced Islam. I believe we have not been created absurdly, but rather for a sublime goal. Coincidence is an untrue and unreal criterion that means nothing to me anymore.

I reiterate what Great Marjeh (Authority) Sheikh Mohammed Hussein Kashef Al-Ghataa has said, «*Deliver Islam to the West, for if you succeed in your mission there, you will achieve your goal of invitation here,*» because the Orient is fond of imitating the West. This is the disease of this generation. During the Islamic era, the Spanish West looked towards the Orient as a model. I call on everyone to closely read and learn about Islam to be able to be guided and, consequently, guide others for human beings are hostile towards the things they do not know about. And all praise be (only) to Allah Who guided us to this, and we would not have been guided had not Allah guided us.

## Russian Guided Sister

**Elena Yorivna Koshiliva** says:

- *Despite the atheistic propaganda imposed by the former communist educational system, I had sensed the existence of One God.*
- *Through the book *The Life of Mohammed* by a Russian author, I admired the Apostle's (p.b.u.h.) personality and started looking for Islamic books.*
- *I am filled with regret for the women who do not wear hijab as they have not been guided to this grace and the values of purity it represents.*
- *I advise my Muslim sisters not to walk randomly on the path of the values that come from the east and the west.*

**Elena, a Russian girl living in a Marxist communist society, did not know that she had an interesting appointment with a wonderful coincidence that Eid Al-Adha brought to her. The Providence has paved the way to her to move from darkness to light and from polytheism to the Right Religion. «I was born once again», says Elena, «I had felt signs indicating deep readiness within myself, as if I were a thirsty man in a desert who found a pond of pure water, so I jumped into that pond to purify myself from the filth of this world that has wasted the spiritual and human values.**

**«My experience with Islam is interesting and rich of moral lessons. If you could see what is deep inside me, you would find that I am extremely happy about that wonderful coincidence. The train that was taking me from a school in a Latvian suburb was in fact carrying me to the shore of happiness and stability, to an oasis of guidance and certainty.»**

**Here, in her marital house in Beirut, and while she was among her family members, Noor al-Islam met Elena and had this interview with her.**

### **Q: Could you tell us about your childhood and early education?**

**A:** I was born in 1973 in Tajikistan, one of the former Soviet Union republics. My family hailed from Russia. My father was a colonel in the army besides being a lawyer, and my mother was a doctor. My parents moved more than once from one country to another. They immigrated to Siberia, but I stayed with my grandmother in Tajikistan where I went to school. When my parents moved to Latvia, they took me with them to the city of Riga. Later on we settled in Ukraine.

My father's work made us move from one former Soviet Republic to another; this enabled me to get to know these different countries and come out into the wider world. So I gained flexibility in behavior and more awareness; besides, I did not have the traditions of one specific country deep-rooted within me. I rather selected the best habits and behavior from each country.

I grew up in an educated family. The milieu I came from in Latvia is like that in Europe as for freedom and cultural and intellectual atmosphere in comparison with the other Russian republics. I spent my childhood between home and school; I did not have the interests that those of my age had.

I don't know why I had the feeling that there is one God, although the atheistic teachings imposed by the educational system never acknowledged this fact. Perhaps my grandmother had an influence in that readiness I had.

My father used to buy me books about the genesis of the world, according to the Gospels; and I tended to ponder upon these issues. When I was 16 or 17, I tried to fast according to the Orthodox (Christian) way that is to abstain from meat and other animal products for 40 days.

**Q: Tell us about the reasons that led you to embrace Islam.**

A: When I was 14, I studied in a school that had Tajik Muslim school-children. I noticed how the Muslim family had a large number of children. I also was touched by the sight of children fasting all day long, and some of them get tired by the end of the day, as it was hot June with its long daylight. That made me wonder why they bore all those pains and sacrificed the food and drink they desired. That was the beginning of my experience with Islam.

When I was 18, I studied Chemistry in a college that was 45-minutes away from our house, so I had to take the train, and there the wonderful coincidence took place as I met my Lebanese husband engineer Mohammad Swaidan. I was reading a book, and he was sitting on the opposite seat. He was on his way back from an annual tour he made on Eid Al-Adha in which he met some friends and exchanged congratulations on the Eid. As we talked, he told me that he was a committed Muslim. He did not master the language at that time.

In another coincidence, we both moved to Kiev (Ukraine) to study there and our relationship got stronger. Ever since, I had a growing interest in Islam. I read *The Life of Mohammed* by a Russian orientalist and admired the Apostle's (p.b.u.h.) personality. Then, I started looking for Islamic books; I got a lot of assistance. I was certain that there was real Islam as I saw the spiritual purity and honesty enjoyed by Muslim students in Kiev who came from different countries.

**Q: How did your family and friends react to that change?**

A: As far as my mother is concerned, the change was not an embarrassment; my father, however, told me, «*You will always be a Christian, even if you try not to.*» Well, I have become a real Muslim, but I won't disown the true values in Christianity.

What made it easier for me was the great change in the structure of the system that the former Soviet Union republics were undergoing, for everything around us was changing.

**Q: What are the positive changes that you have noticed after embracing Islam?**

A: I felt that I have reached my goal and achieved the certainty and reassurance I had been seeking, because I was longing for the truth and for answers to the nagging questions about creed and behavior in life.

It is noteworthy that I had not experienced sinful acts before I got married and embraced Islam; my soul and body were pure and remained as such. It is as if I fell into a water pond that I had been yearning for



swimming in. To me, it was like a symbol of the purity granted by Islam to its followers. In Lebanon, I have benefited a great deal from a teacher who taught me some Arabic, reciting the Holy Quran, and interpreting some *duaas*.

**Q: As a Russian woman from a non-Islamic country, how do you view the unveiling (not wearing hijab) phenomenon that is spread in Islamic societies?**

A: Those women are suffering from loss; I mean they are lost. I feel overwhelming regret for their not being guided to the grace of *hijab* and the purity values it represents. Nevertheless, when wearing *hijab*, the Muslim woman has to observe its requirements in the way she speaks, behaves, and deals with others.

I see unveiling in our modern societies as an abnormal phenomenon that has occurred in Islamic and Christian societies in the east and the west. One of the main reasons (behind this phenomenon) is the woman's starting to work and the change in social and ethical values resulting from the Industrial Revolution. For instance, before the Bolshevik revolution, *hijab* was prevalent in Russia. But equality between men and women, which is an untrue and fabricated slogan, has led to the wide spread of the unveiling phenomenon besides other negative results from which our societies are still suffering. Therefore, I believe the return to *hijab* is a return to origin and nature.

**Q: How do you see the conditions of Muslims today?**

A: I see that those who completely embrace the faith are few. When I went to Morocco, I noticed that *hijab* there was a mere habit, and people cared only about the religion's trivia while wasting the essence of this great faith. Moreover, there are many «*religious*» people who work in religion only to serve their own ends.

For example, in the Month of *Ramadan*, everyone recites the Holy Quran and goes to mosques; but when the holy month is over, they return to their normal attitude of carelessness about religion and ethics. We must not desert the Holy Quran in the months other than *Ramadan*.

**Q: What do you think about the condition of the Muslim woman today?**

A: The woman that wears *hijab* must prove to others that she does not confine herself to her life or isolate herself from the society, for she stocks energy that she can invest in guiding other girls along with maintaining her house chores, which are more important than any social activity that takes place outside the house. This must take place, of course, while she maintains her feminine nature.

**Q: What do you suggest for guiding the youth?**

A: In my opinion, adolescents and the youth are remarkably attracted to watch corrupting media, especially the television. This per se is a phenomenon of dire consequences, particularly for children. Parents have to safeguard their children's education. They must not leave them prey to

absurd empty programs, for a child will be the result of what he or she sees and hears.

I believe officials and parents must impose censorship to bar some TV programs and immoral commercials.

**Q: Any last comment you would like to say to our readers?**

A: I advise my Muslim sisters not to walk randomly on the path of the values that come from the east and the west. They have to return to their originality and to import only that which is the best. They must benefit from the experience of the west which has examined our civilization and took its best aspects. Unfortunately, we see the opposite in the Islamic countries as Muslims are fascinated by fallacious dazzling issues that are reflections of the worst western immorality, indecency, and remoteness from faith and virtue.

## **Carmen Sarkeesian (Houda)**

Carmen Sarkeesian (Houda) is an Armenian girl who has been guided to the light of Islam and who embraced the True Religion after an interesting journey and a rich experience of search and exploration. The key of this guidance was meeting her spouse, but the faith journey did not stop at a certain stage; the guided girl moved ahead, driven by the love of knowledge, to drink from the fountain of Islamic culture and scoop out of libraries what made her experience worth writing in a book that pleases and benefits readers.

Here are excerpts from her book «The Story of My Islam».

### **Birth and early years**

I was born in 1965 in Kuwait where I spent the best years of my life. I still wish to be able to return and live once again on its good land where I was born, grew up, studied, worked, got married, and had my child, Ali, but the most important thing is that Allah has guided me to Islam there. So how can I forget that land? It is the beat of my heart, and a human being cannot live without the beating of the heart.

### **How Islam was introduced to her**

In the summer of 1985, I worked as a clerk in a Kuwaiti engineering company. I organized files and did the secretariat work for the man who later became my husband.

When he proposed to me I agreed, but my consent was accompanied with some fear, because I was a Christian Armenian and he was a Muslim.

Here I have to clarify the meaning of «*Armenian*»; when they hear the word Armenian, a lot of people think immediately of a synonym: Christian. This is wrong, for that word means that the roots of this person are traced back to Armenia, one of the former Soviet Union republics, which is now independent. Besides, there are many Muslim Armenians; therefore, the word Armenian is like Syrian, Lebanese, or Egyptian.

The reason behind my fear was that I had known some Christian women who got married to Muslim men, but their marriages failed, and they had to divorce. Nevertheless, I was confident that our marriage would be successful, as I was certain of my husband's honesty through which he managed to attract me to Islam as he represented the good model in the way he behaved with me. After converting to Islam, I chose the name Houda instead of my former name, Carmen.

### **The influence of her conversion to Islam and her marriage to a Muslim on her relatives.**

In the beginning we kept our marriage secret in order to avoid reactions from relatives and friends. But I was surprised when I got a phone call from my sister who told me that she had known about our marriage, and I remembered the holy verse {*It may be that ye hate a thing while Allah hath placed in it abundant good*} [An-Nisaa, verse 19]. Therefore, I told her the truth. My parents also had doubts in that regard, so they asked my husband to come to discuss the issue. After my parents failed to influence

my decision, it was agreed that I should leave their house and live with my husband. My mother's tears spoke better than any words.

My parents boycotted me for only two weeks after which they visited me but without allowing me to visit them.

My mother-in-law knew about the marriage only when my husband had to undergo a surgery. My husband told his family about our marriage to preserve me and my right to inheritance in case he passed away.

My mother-in-law took me to their house for the first time. There I saw a big library that had many books about science, literature, and Islamic history. Although we stayed up for a long time, everyone woke up early for the Morning Prayer.

### **How she embraced Islam**

My meetings with his family evoked many questions about prayer, *hijab*, and separation between men and women. The journey of knowledge and exploration began here as I turned to reading. My mother-in-law encouraged me to do so. Before that I had lived a conflict, and now my happy journey with the True Religion began. My husband had not talked to me a lot about Islam as he did not want to force me to embrace the faith in line with a prior agreement between us; he answered my questions briefly, and if I did not ask, he did not say anything. He felt pain for me because I was not Muslim, did not pray, and did not wear *hijab*.

I did not want to do any of these things, but I knew about the embarrassment I was causing to my husband. In spite of this, he had the indirect role of drawing me close to Islam. For this end, he listened to many programs about the Holy Quran and cultural programs about the True Religion.

### **Her impressions and comments on the dialogue method**

I acknowledge and certify that the fashion in which the discussion took place did not hurt my feelings towards Christianity - my former faith. I do not remember that the Muslims with whom I talked offended, not even once, Christ (a.s.) or his mother. They love and respect Christ (a.s.), besides believing in his message. Muslims declare that the one who does not believe in Christ's (a.s.) message is not a Muslim even if he believes in Mohammed's (p.b.u.h.). It is also strange that to underline Prophet Mohammed's greatness they recite quotes made by Christian writers and thinkers such as Bernard Shaw, Goethe, Carlyle, Lamartine, Jorda, Gibran and Noimeh, and even by others who are not from the People of the Book such as Nehro. I had to remain silent during their discussions because they knew about Christianity more than I did.

### **How she committed herself to the True Religion's ideas and code of conduct**

I went on reading, and my husband explained the things that were too difficult for me to understand. This went on until late 1987 when I wore *hijab* and started praying without being forced to do so by my husband or his family. I used to listen to a radio station that aired doctorate or masters dissertations of students who wanted to specialize in Islamic sciences. The

discussions of those dissertations had a great influence on me. Moreover, I listened to taped lectures in the form of questions and answers. I also read some English books by fair orientalists as I completely mastered the language.

After reading each of the books, my husband and I had discussions about it in different ways; he would once be a Muslim and I would be a Christian, or vice versa, or we would both be Muslims or Christians. I did all that in a bid to find the truth and so that my Islam would be for the sake of Allah and His Apostle (p.b.u.h.) and not for my husband or because of my love to him.

### **A comment or an incident about her experience with Islam**

Yes, this idea has accompanied my experience with the True Religion. My husband had an American friend, Jim Taylor, who worked with him in the same company. He sometimes came to visit us. Jim did not believe that there was a Creator; he believed in «*coincidence*» and Nature.

My husband had a two-week vacation, so we decided to spend those two weeks in Sudan as guests of a Sudanese brother. Mr. Taylor wanted to come with us, and we traveled by air.

During the trip we were talking, and everything seemed lovely and good. Suddenly, things changed, and the senior steward spoke via the microphone demanding that all passengers return to their seats, fasten their seat belts and stop smoking. The way the hostesses behaved was not normal; they moved very fast, and their smiles looked unnatural and artificial. Such a behavior always indicates that something is wrong. Fear overwhelmed all the passengers. We looked at the plane's wing to see amounts of liquid coming out of it.

«*The plane is unloading fuel,*» a hostess told us. My husband's friend looked very scared. I noticed the way he behaved.

My husband took out a small Quran that he always kept with him and started reciting the Sura of Yassin.

«*For God's sake read faster, read faster,*» Jim cried.

«*Read what?*» my surprised husband asked.

«*Read The Quran, The Quran!*» he replied, murmuring «*Oh my God, save us!*»

### **How did the incident end? And what is the moral lesson in it?**

The plane landed safely with Allah's mercy and due to the wisdom of the skillful pilot. My objective of telling this story is to note how the atheist who was with us sought refuge in Allah asking The Almighty to rescue him. He did not seek assistance from the Gospels, but from The Quran. His pure innate sense that he had been trying to kill with materialism popped out at those difficult moments and forced him to seek refuge in Allah, The Only God.

The Holy Quran describes this type of human beings when it says, {*And if We make him taste mercy from Us, after a distress hath toucheth him, certainly sayeth he: «This is my due; and I deem not the Hour (of Reckoning) would ever be established*} [Fossilat. Verse 50].

### **A final comment to our readers**

I want to underline the image of brotherhood, love, tolerance, and ethics that Islam enjoys. I can say, without any exaggeration, that there is no other religion that can compete with Islam in these aspects. Therefore, I call upon all those who had not returned to the light of Islam yet to live the experience I have had and seek the truth which they will attain if they purify themselves from worldly obstacles, fight the evil in themselves, and read. If they do so, they will see things clearly and will find out that the True Religion is the path to the salvation of humankind from evils and sins besides being the means to reach the shore of tranquility, happiness and safety.

## From the Darkness of Apartheid to the Light of Islam

**Abdullah Shafiek Stuurman**

*When he saw them prostrating themselves in worship to Allah, his heart became submissive while thoughts and questions invaded his mind. On a rainy day that he will never forget, he turned his face to Qebla and sincerely prayed to Allah (be He exalted) to guide him to the Right Path before prostrating himself.*

*The journey to find the truth, which began through reading and asking questions, went on after he declared converting to Islam.*

*His heart was opened to the love of the Apostle (pbuh) and his purified family (as) whom he took as a model in thought, creed, and behavior.*

**He is Abdullah Shafiek Stuurman from South Africa who talked about his conversion to Islam and his love to Ahlul-Bait (as) in this interview with Noor Al-Islam.**

My name is Abdullah Shafiek Stuurman. I was born in Cape Town, South Africa in 1972, the period that witnessed the climax of the Apartheid Regime. I was born from a group or sector of the population that was considered as ‘*The Coloreds*’ i.e. ‘*second-class citizens*’, after the so-called ‘blacks’ were considered as ‘third-class’ citizens. Of course, the descendants from Europe, ‘*The Whites*’, were classified as ‘*First Class Citizens*’. We were neither hundred percent ‘white’ nor ‘black’, hence this ‘second-class’ status, according to the classification of the former Apartheid regime.

As an example of the affect of the Apartheid regime’s propaganda on the psyche of the individual, I will give this small anecdote to show how it affected us in South Africa.

I was 5 years old, and we used to play with all the other children. Opposite to our school was an open field. One of the construction companies started to build a complex there. As was the case always, the watchman was ‘a black man’, one of the original indigenous people of South Africa. This person had a young child approximately my age at the time; he used to play on this open field, but none of the other children wanted to play with him because he was black. My former neighbors’ daughter was my best friend, and she told me that I must not play with this black child because they (the black people) are ‘devils’. While my friend and I passed by this construction site that was opposite to our school, this black child started to run in our direction. He wanted to play with us. We were so horrified because ‘the devil’ was running towards us. We ran away to the nearest house because ‘the devil’ wants to devour our meat !

This will tell how the Apartheid regime had constantly sought to establish the notion of discrimination among human being, according to their colors in spite of the horrible repercussions of such ideas at the economic, cultural, and social levels in South Africa.

### Early quest for Truth

I attended a Roman Catholic School, St. Clemence, in Cape Town. My grandmother was an extremely religious person. She had exercised great influence over me.



When I was 15 years old, I started to search for the right religion. Although I was 'a staunch Christian' at the time, I always wanted to be on the truth side. Hence I wanted to know other peoples' beliefs. The religion that was popular in South Africa, other than Christianity, was Islam. Therefore, I decided to ask some questions pertaining to the Muslims' Faith.

### **The first Light: Going to a Mosque**

One Friday I wanted to see how Muslims pray. I sneaked into a *Masjid* to see what Muslims did in a Mosque. I stood for a while at the door of one of the mosques in Cape Town where I saw a sight that had a profound impact on me. I have witnessed the most beautiful sight ever in my life: the way Muslims prostrate before Allah. Immediately, I knew that this is the way to surrender oneself before The Most High. That was one of the happiest days of my life, to see 'the sajdah'.

I spent the whole weekend pondering over religion. On the following Monday, it was raining heavily, and I decided not to go to school. I had a small mattress which my father's mother had given me.

I had an idea: to pray like Muslims, as I have seen them that Friday. I took the small mattress my granny gave me and put it in the direction of Mecca. Well, why I chose Mecca I don't know, but I knew Allah is everywhere, so no matter to what direction I will turn, I will be in Allah's presence. Afterwards, I spoke to Allah. I told him that He had created me. I wanted to be His servant, and I wanted to be with the truth. While I was saying this I prostrated like Muslims, as I saw them do that Friday, and I begged Allah to guide me and help me find the truth. I wept sincerely as I prostrated. I just wanted to tell my God that I was in need of guidance and that I knew that there was a God, but I desperately needed His guidance. I wanted to know about Islam, the Final Message.

### **Reaching the safety shore**

I have to acknowledge the favor of the person who has facilitated my acceptance of Islam and conversion to the True Religion, my good friend and schoolmate Wasila Augustin. I was Christian, and she was Muslim. I asked her many questions about Islam, and she answered; moreover, she gave me several books to read. However, the more I read about Islam, the more questions I had. She was equally shocked when I have announced my acceptance of Islam in 1989.

I also have to mention my paternal uncle, Abdul Kareem Stuurman, who had embraced Islam approximately 25 years ago. When I wanted to know more about Islam, he answered my questions as well. He equally gave me several books to read. He gave me more information about the True Religion.

### **At the Karate Club**

At a later stage, Wasila subscribed to a Karate Club that she convinced me to join as well. Fortunately, the person in charge of the club, Faried Louis, was also a believer, a young man who had embraced Islam. He used to invite us, the youngsters, to his house where we held discussions about Islam and *Ahlul-Bait* (a.s.). He gave us several books about Islam, the

Apostle (p.b.u.h.), and his purified family (a.s.). I became a believer following the teachings of this Islamic school. I found out that Imamism or Jaafari Twelverism is a correct flawless doctrine in spite of the attempts made by others to distort the image of this sect and make it look as though it were an apostate movement. I must also not forget my late next-door neighbor Ibrahim Davids who has taught me many things about Islam and was one of the first who introduced me to the teachings of *Ahlul-Bait* (a.s.).

### **The Family: Rejection then Acceptance**

My mother initially did not like the idea of me being Muslim; however, when she saw that she could not stop me, she ‘backed down’ and accepted me as such. Likewise, my father was vehemently opposed to the idea; however, when they have seen that their opposition bore no fruit, they had to make peace with the idea. Up to now, I enjoy considerable amicable and cordial relations with both my parents. When they saw my insistence, they backed down and made peace with a Muslim in the Family.

### **Freedom of conviction and belief**

The profound impact of my acceptance of Islam was phenomenal. For the first time in my life, I felt the freedom of asking questions about Islam, for asking questions freely is something that distinguishes Islam and Muslims from others. This was the major fulfillment I enjoyed besides the fact that Islam is built on logic, reason, and rational thinking.

Whenever a person buries the inherent prejudice, bias, and superstitious beliefs, he has inherited from the family and society, he will arrive at logic, reason, and rational thinking.

Furthermore, utmost sincerity, true honesty, and truthfulness are the only ingredients to arrive at the truth whereby Allah has promised that He will help anyone if this is his motto!

Presently, I am still studying the creed, *Sharia* and concepts of Islam in a *Hawza* (seminary) in Lebanon to be able to fulfill my duty and invite my countrymen to Islam when I return, *Inshallah*, to my homeland. I am also translating some useful books in this regard.

### **Islam in South Africa**

Islam is looked upon in a good light in South Africa, but with suspicion because of the people’s ignorance of the faith and due to the international propaganda against it. May Allah help them see the light and accept it as well! Presently, scores of people embrace Islam annually, especially the doctrine of *Ahlul-Bait* (a.s.).

Spreading Islam requires intensive efforts by Muslim activists, especially as South Africa had been burdened with a racist regime whose repercussions are still taking their toll on the people there.

## Coming Home to Islam:

### Personal Accounts of New Muslims

- «We directly experienced the way of Islam - the beauty of people striving to live a spiritual life»

The Lutz family

- «This religion is imminently practical and yet profound»

Muhammad Amin Bootman

- «When I converted, it was because my heart was telling me to»

Jennifer McLennan

**It is our pleasure to publish these three statements by American men and women who have recently converted to Islam. These testimonies serve as evidence to the fact that, in spite of all the complications and difficulties, Islam is still capturing many hearts and minds that have been exhausted by the long walk on roads that contradict the mind and soul and lead to alienation and concern.**

### Testimony of the Lutz Family of New Mexico: As narrated by Rahmah Lutz

We first encountered the teachings of Islam over twenty years ago when we were a young married couple with two beautiful children. We had sought a spiritual path for a while and had met many good and sincere people from different disciplines. Every path had benefits that we enjoyed, but none of them «fit» comfortably.

This led to a study of the teachings of Islam, and we began to repeat the key word that surfaced over and over: «Allah». We fasted during *Ramadan* although we still didn't understand the regulations of the fast, and we made simple attempts to pray as best we could.

At the time we were isolated in a small town in southern Colorado and had never met any Muslims. In the summer of 1977, I attended a Women's Weekend at Lama Foundation, a spiritual center located on a beautiful and remote mountain top in northern New Mexico. For the first time, I prayed with Muslim women and asked questions about Islam. I returned home convinced that Islam was the «way of the family.»

My husband, Abdur Rahim, then visited the Lama Foundation himself, and we were invited to spend the winter studying Islamic texts at the Intensive Study Center. There were available copies of Al-Qur'an Al-Karim and collections of *Hadiths*. Abdur Rahim accepted the invitation, came home, quit his job, packed up our family, and we moved to the mountain.

We were directed to some young American Muslim families living in Santa Fe. When they discovered we were interested in Islam, they took us into their homes so we could pray with them and ask questions. Never once did they suggest we might be burdening them, although they were struggling to support their families on very little income.

Never once did they suggest we should pay for spiritual instruction. They believed that Allah had sent us to their door, and they opened their doors wide to receive us. We not only studied Islam from books; we directly experienced the way of Islam - the beauty of people striving to live a

spiritual life and share their knowledge, provision, and blessings without question.

### **Testimony of Muhammad Amin Bootman, Vice - President, Bank of America**

My wife and I converted to Islam a few years ago and, more recently, some of our older children have as well. Admittedly, our path to this religion has been traveled in slow motion. I had studied the ideas of George Gurdjieff for over 30 years, all of my adult life.

Here in California, where New Age religions and Eastern philosophies flourish, there has been a lack of popular interest in Islam. Negative press is certainly part of the reason, but at a personal level, I can only say that Islam was simply invisible.

In this culture, everyone loves to shop. New malls, subcultures, and belief systems seem to pop up overnight. Ironically, locked within the confines of the ultimate secular state, increasing numbers of people are shopping for religions.

As a convert, I can now see that it is a great pity that this religion is not at the top of the shopping list because, in some strange way, Islam includes everything else. As a newcomer, it was something of a shock over the last few years to encounter the marked Islamic reverence for all the prophets of the Torah and the Gospels. There seems to be a lot more about Moses and Abraham in The Qur'an than the Prophet himself, (peace be upon all of them). When you think about it, such deference and innate modesty would, indeed, befit the bearer of God's final and perfected message to all of mankind. A faith such as Islam, which resolutely focuses on the Unseen One, has an uphill battle to get noticed at all.

My hope at this point, as a husband and a father, is that Islam will provide a much-needed balance for my family. Children learn by example, and this religion presents a standard of behavior quite beyond anything in my own culture. This religion is imminently practical and yet profound. In fact, Islam seems to be constructed along the lines of a whole series of balances. It is direct and yet sophisticated.

### **Testimony of Jennifer McLennan: Former Marketing Officer, British Columbia**

It happened so gradually that I didn't recognize what happened until I sat down to tell this story. I bought a computer with a free CD-Rom encyclopedia, and the first thing I did was look up «Islam.» A colleague at work learned of my budding research and asked very casually if I'd learned about the Sufis. He was from the South Pacific himself, but had read extensively about them. So off I went to the library and checked out all the books on Sufism. I didn't get very far, though I enrolled in a course on Islamic Art.

I was floored. The professor's approach was to teach the basic tenets of Islam before delving into the art. Since everything in Islam is done in the Name of God, I learned, it seemed to make sense.

It was like everything I had come to believe on my own - through informal explorations as a teenager and formal schooling as a university

student, and self-analysis - was rolled up into a neat little package and handed to me. I had never felt so much like I belonged to something and that something was made for me. The Islamic concepts of God and angels, its recognition of all holy books, its respect for other religions and policy of tolerance for other religions, and many other truths rang true to me.

I went to my professor after the course was over and asked what I should do. At that moment, she became the guiding light in my life that she remains today.

A few people questioned my conversion: they thought it too hasty and not well thought out, but most expressed their apprehensions, however, gently about the religion of Islam. The funny thing is that I didn't know what they were talking about. Born in 1975, I wasn't exposed to the fame Islam was subject to until the Gulf War. Even then I didn't understand enough of what was going on to develop prejudices against Islam. What I learned, I learned in my heart, and when I converted it was because my heart was telling me to, not because it made sense in any other way, because in the worldly sense, it didn't.

I know now that it was the greatest decision I have ever made - the first one I made for my heart and soul. And I know now that I was right to do so because the obstacles I might have expected to encounter early on this path have not appeared for me. My family and friends have been beyond supportive, and the Muslim community has been very open in welcoming me. *Alhamdulillah.*

## French Sister Marie Therese

(Hajja Mariam)

- *I was fond of looking for knowledge and truth; I felt I had before me a goal that I had to pursue.*
- *When hijab and job conflicted, I preferred to quit the work and maintain hijab to be in harmony with my principle and creed.*

Marie Therese Chambordone (Hajja Mariam) is a lady who has been guided to Islam in the wake of a meeting that took place in the French University of Poitiers with a law student who later became a well know lawyer. Poitiers, that old city, is the first Gallic town at which the Arab conquerors arrived after landing in Andalusia (history says a decisive battle between Arabs and Franks, led by Charles Martel, took place there at a site called the Land of Martyrs - Marbre des Martyres - and Arabs had to retreat from Poitiers). It is the city that resisted the Arabs.

Conquered, Marie's heart responded to the invitation of Islam, the faith in which there is no compulsion. If the sword could not penetrate through that town, the calm logic and the disputation in the best manner managed to get through the doors of the spirit, thought, and heart of a French young woman that was an Education student.

In her house in a quiet district of Beirut's suburbs where she lives with her husband lawyer Samih Hamdan, *Noor Al-Islam* met her and had this interview.

### Q: Could you first tell us briefly about your birth and childhood?

A. I was born in Poitiers, a French town that is around 350 km to the southwest of Paris, to Catholic parents. My father was a clerk in a factory. After I finished my basic schooling, I went to the Education College and I graduated as a teacher; I taught for a few years in France before I came to Lebanon.

During my childhood, I got some religious education. At that time, students in France received religious education, but that was not compulsory; it rather had to do with the parents' choice. A priest or a vicar was entrusted with teaching children of ages between 7 and 12.

I liked those lessons, especially the morals which urged us to behave well. These lessons guided my life; for instance, we were taught not to lie, to be kind and tolerant, not to harm anyone, besides what is stated in the Ten Commandments such as prohibition of adultery, killing, theft, etc.

When I came of age, I felt that my feelings and thoughts were drawn to what is absolute and true. I was fond of looking for knowledge and truth. I felt as if I had something missing and that I had a goal that I needed to pursue.

### Q: How did you embrace Islam?

A: Before Islam was introduced to me, I used to feel that Allah was always there, in my entity. When I felt happy, I thanked Him. As if I was waiting for that change that has filled my entity with the gifts of the True Religion.

I was sitting in the college cafeteria and the student who later became my husband was sitting close to me. It was a coincidence that we met in that scientific atmosphere that was open to dialogue and questions.

When the waiter served food made of pork, Samih said he could not have such food because it is *Haram* (prohibited) in *Sharia* and according to medicine. Instead, he ordered Halal meat or a vegetarian meal. When he was asked about that, he answered briefly. Here I intervened because I wanted to know about that issue. He told me that that meat was not good for eating according to the *Sharia* teachings and to medicine, for when Allah prohibited eating it, that was due to His wisdom and benignancy. I accepted his reply. When we met later, I ordered a Halal meal or, if that was not available, a vegetarian one.

Afterwards, I started asking questions about the facts of this religion that prohibited eating pork.

(*Noor Al-Islam* reporter drew Mrs. Hamdan's attention to the fact that pork was prohibited in Christianity as well, and Roman emperors used to force some of the early Christians to eat it and threaten to kill them if they did not.)

After that meeting, I was able to obtain a copy of The Holy Quran interpreted into French by a Moroccan and a Frenchman; the translation was not good. Today I have two other translations, one Saudi and the other Iranian.

I met my husband in France but did not know the truth about Islam. However, when I moved to Beirut my understanding of things became deeper. When I had my children, they are five, the eldest, Shadi, wanted to study *Sharia* at the Islamic University; he helped me understand the principles and teachings of Islam. As soon as I arrived in Beirut, I started performing the duties, such as praying and fasting, and Allah has presented me with the gift of going to Hajj. I also accepted wearing *Hijab*, which I preferred to maintaining my job as a teacher in a French school in Lebanon. Therefore, as soon as I finished my contract with the French state, I rendered my resignation to the College Protestants, because when *hijab* and job conflicted, I preferred to quit the work and maintain *hijab* to be in harmony with my principle and creed.

### **Q: How do you view Islam and Muslims today?**

A: If I have the right to classify others - because I do not attribute purity to my soul, as Allah, be He exalted, says in The Holy Quran {***Do not attribute purity to your souls; He knows him best who guards (against evil)***} -, Muslims, in my opinion, are divided into four categories:

- Those born as Muslims but do not hold the Islamic creed: They do not know about the rules of the True Religion. In fact, they know nothing about *wajibs* (duties). These include the women not observing *hijab*, nor wearing decent clothes, and thus spreading trial and temptation:

- Those born as Muslims with creed but without education: These love Allah (s.w.t.), the Prophet (p.b.u.h.) and the Imams (a.s.). However, they are not well-educated when it comes to Islamic education. They usually do not differentiate between customs and myths, such as superstition about the number 13, and they think this is religion. There are *wajib* acts that these



people neglect, but they perform things not related to religion thinking otherwise.

- Those born as Muslims with creed and education: Those are the ones who had studied Islam and are able to teach it to others. They have the ability to persuade; however, they believe in Islam theoretically. Some of them lie, cheat, dissemble, backbite, slander, act arrogantly, and do not show tolerance.

- Muslims in birth, creed, education and action: These do exist, although they are few. They spread in the earth a lovely air. When one sees them, one smiles and is pleased. They are the ones described by the Prophet (p.b.u.h.) when he says: «*The closest of you to me on Judgment Day are those with the best ethics, those who smile and are kind to others.*» They are the humble who like others and are liked by others. They are the ones who seek to live a pure Islamic life throughout every moment of their days. They are tolerant and humble, they assist others and are models to those who know them, and they only say what is necessary for them to say; they live as strangers in their communities.

**Q: What is your opinion on women in general, and how do you evaluate hijab?**

A: The woman is included in the aforementioned categories. Women frequently make mistakes such as appearing in public with make up that makes them source of trial, temptation and seduction; this is a result of poor house education and the influence of the milieu, school, and the media (newspapers, magazines, television, and cinema). All that may lead the woman to blindly imitate the westerners and ignore the values of the True Religion.

A believer woman does not believe in parts of the Book and disbelieves in other parts. On the contrary, she commits herself to The Holy Quran and its instructions and she sees in the Sura of an-Noor (Light) and the Verse of *Hijab* (Veil) instructors and guides.

I have observed *hijab* and wore it since I understood that it is a Divine order. Being a believer means nothing other than being obedient to Allah's orders. If I didn't do so, it means that I'm placing my will and desire above the Creator's will.

**Q: Then what are the merits of hijab in your opinion?**

A: *Hijab* is something that protects and maintains the woman and the man alike. It tells the woman to be decent in the way she moves and speaks, and makes her safe from others' mentioning the details of her body and spares her backbiting, because *hijab* prevents others from seeing the details of her body. Besides, it bars her from talking about fashion which wastes time uselessly. *Hijab* makes me monitor myself and my movements, behave well, and talk to others in chastity as I am wearing this outfit which is imposed by Islam. When I first wore it, I felt gratitude to The Creator Who has guided me to the blessing of the True Religion. When a girl wears *hijab* this means she knows a lot about Islam, for it is a position, an opinion, and a commitment.

**Q: How do you view the West?**

A: When I look at the westerners objectively, I see that they have a lot of defects and types of corruption and debauchery. However, they have also some virtues such as honesty, cooperation, respect of others, respect of others' freedoms, and precision in dealing with one another.

I feel regret for the westerners' ignorance of Islam although they have many virtues and traits that Islam commends and urges its followers to observe.

**Q: What do you like to say finally to the readers?**

A: I have nothing to add other than reminding that a Muslim should feel his duty towards his fellow Muslim. They should not neglect guiding and advising one another. I also urge Muslims to narrow the gap between thought and practice, between theory and application.

## **Late British Muslim Hajj Abdullah Malek** (Arthur Henry Broer King):

**This is how Allah, be He exalted, has guided me to Islam.**

This is another bright witness and another story by someone who was guided to Islam, a story that clearly manifests the attractiveness of this great faith, its ability to penetrate the heart and living souls and to waken and attract minds regardless of how remote they are or how different their interests are. This is what one gets from the story of late British Muslim Hajj Abdullah Malek's conversion to Islam which he himself had typed before his death in Beirut. *Noor al-Islam* obtained the story from the family of his widow Mrs. Suheila a-Sabbagh. Some parts of the story were taken away for the sake of brevity.

### **Upbringing and Education**

I was born in London on July 31, 1926. My father, Reginald Canton King, was British, while my mother, Magdolina, was Dutch. I had no brothers or sisters, since my mother died when I was 18 months old, and my father never married after her death. He died when I was 14.

I went to a British public school until I was 19 years old. At that time, World War II broke out. When London was bombarded by the German forces I worked in the civil defense as a school activity. I was also a champion in fencing.

### **The Military Background**

I joined the British Army in 1946, following the end of World War II. In early 1947 I became an emergency infantry officer. I liked the army life and decided to have a permanent job in the army. I underwent the necessary tests and arrangements and had that job.

In 1951, my battalion traveled to Malay in the Far East where the Chinese Communist organizations staged a guerilla war with the aim of controlling that country and making it Communist.

I returned to England by the end of 1953 and was appointed as battalion adjutant with the rank of a captain. In 1958, my battalion was overseas again as we were dispatched to Bahrain on a special mission in Al-Mohraq Island where we carried out war games in the desert. Nine months later I was promoted to major. Later I became a special administration staff officer in the British Armed Forces in Masqat, Oman. There were a lot of problems and riots at that time between the rebels and the sultan's rule. Although the time I spent there was short, I got to know the geographic nature of Oman especially as I moved a lot in the country.

### **Embracing Islam**

When I was 35, I reached the turning point of my life, the moment of decision-making. I was a major in the British forces, and I had a good chance to be promoted as I was a graduate of the staff and command college. However, I did not sleep comfortably. I always had strange thoughts and concerns. I fought those fears until I took the tough decision, following a long road of struggle with my self, and became Muslim in the

year 1963. I knew I might have to render my resignation from the British Army.

I have had interest in religion since my early school days, when I was raised to Protestantism. In school also I was driven by my needs and experiences towards the Protestant Bishopric Church. Anyhow, my religious interests weakened after I finished schooling because of my new military career.

During my service in the British Army in Malay, my interest in religion was revived as I had good ties with the citizens and civilians there. Consequently, I learned about and saw the way four faiths were practiced in Malay: Christianity by the Europeans, Hinduism by the Indians, Buddhism by the Chinese, and Islam by native Malays.

In the beginning, I took interest in all religions. I asked simple but deep questions just to ease my curiosity. I then felt that I was attracted by Islam and the secure tranquil life that Muslims led. I believe my actual interest in Islam began when I first witnessed the Holy Month of *Ramadan*, when Muslims fast all day long the entire month every year. I was touched by the enthusiasm the Muslim Malays had about this month. I felt an urge to learn more about this religion that orders its followers to be humble and to subdue their bodies and needs. I wanted to draw a comparison between Islam and Christianity, so I studied each of the two faiths thoroughly. Just like any Christian, I had many questions about the clergymen. I had the chance to notice the lives of many priests; I was upset because they would not answer many of my questions. They insisted, though, that they could mediate between me and God claiming that they could forgive and ease any sin on His behalf. I have always felt that my faith is a personal matter between me and my Creator. Once again, I sensed that if one believes in a faith, one needs to live it, not to only be present in a church once a week. This is part of the old problem: faith with no action.

When I visited Kuala Lumpur, the Malay capital, I went to libraries and bought all the books I found about religion, especially the Islamic faith, including a translated copy of The Holy Quran, Islam's sacred book. I was also sent books from England. I read them gluttonously at all the spare time I had. Besides, I spent many hours discussing the issue of Islam with friends.

I remained confused until two things became clear to me:

There is no way to doubt the Oneness of Allah; I felt this is what I could believe in, for it was more logical than the Trinity principle.

Islam proposes a complete way of living. In Islam, it is not enough to be faithful: you need to live Islam in every minute and every day of your life.

## Guidance

Contemplating the issue, I believed that if there was a god, he would certainly guide any person whom he sees is really seeking the truth and that there must be power in prayer. Therefore, I prayed enthusiastically seeking guidance to the truth from Allah. Then I had a vision: I had a dream in which thousands of people walked and trotted around the *Kaaba*. That was a long time before I knew anything about the Hajj rituals and circumambulating the *Kaaba*. Following that dream, many doubts were

removed from my mind. As I proceeded with reading, I knew that I was getting closer and closer to Islam; I have actually been guided.

By the end of 1953, it was time for me to leave Malay. Then Allah guided me to the faith. Nevertheless, I still had some doubt as I wondered whether my belief in Islam was a result of my relations with Malay and my Malayan friends. Besides, I feared that people may say bad things about me if I converted to Islam. Therefore, driven by my weakness, I decided not to take any further steps but to return to England and indulge in military life leaving things to move according to the natural course.

Three years of disinterest in religion passed, then I saw the same dream again; it awoke my conscience, and I realized that I was destined to become a real active Muslim. Nonetheless, I chose to take some more time as I thought that I was still young and had a lot of time and life ahead, and so decided to take my decision after I finish my military service.

Here I have to go back with my story to those days when I was a staff officer in the sultanate armed forces in Masqat. As I worked there, I wanted once again to be part of the method of the Islamic life and join, during the month of *Ramadan*, the ranks of the Muslim believers (Arabs, Pakistanis, and Baluch) who faithfully performed their duties.

Physical dangers had me consider the possibility of having a short life. Death by landmines was quite common at that time; people were killed when their cars moved on landmines, and I thought the same could happen to my car, and I could get killed. I wanted to die as a Muslim, if that was Allah's will, after I did what I knew was the right thing to do. I wanted to be buried as a Muslim and stand before my Creator as a Muslim.

The next day after I left Masqat, thoughts stormed into my mind. I wondered whether I had the courage to declare my conversion or to keep it as a secret. The devil tempted me to neglect the whole thing. But I knew that I would hate myself for the rest of my life if I did so. I kept asking myself: «*Should I do it? Can I do it?*» The answer would not take long to come.

The next morning, an Arab driver came to wake me up. Seeing my translated copy of The Holy Quran he was surprised and asked me, «*Do you read The Holy Quran?*» Having taken my decision, I replied, «*Alhamdulillah, I'm a Muslim.*» When he heard those words, the driver embraced me and kissed my cheeks. I was overwhelmed with a sense of relief and happiness for taking the decision, so I cried.

When I arrived in Sharjah, I told my British commander that I had embraced Islam; he was shocked. Some British officers, who were annoyed by my conversion, opposed me, while the Muslims in the force rejoiced, and I was assisted by their backing to bear the difficulties. Many Arab men and officers helped me learn about my faith and its duties, especially praying in Arabic, along with the life style I should lead as a Muslim.

Shortly after the Month of *Ramadan* in 1962, I went to the Judge of Sharjah who questioned me about my faith. When I testified my witness as a Muslim, he wrote me a certificate stating that I had accepted Islam as a faith and become a Muslim. My name as a Muslim became Abdullah Abdel-Malek. Then I rendered my resignation from the British Army.

### **My New Life**

When it was time for me to leave the United Arab Emirates, I decided to spend my vacation in Lebanon. For me as a Muslim, I wanted to learn all that was possible about Islam, The Quran, *Hadith*, and Islamic *Sharia* (Law). I knew that was difficult in Abu Dhabi, but in Lebanon there were many Muslim *Ulama* from whom I could learn a lot. Then, in 1964, I was able, Thank Allah, to go to Hajj.

Later in that year, a friend suggested that I marry a very good believer young woman whose family he knew very well. I liked the young woman very much, and we got married in 1966. We had a very happy life, *Alhamdulillah*.

In 1967, I went to Hajj for the second time, this time accompanied by my wife. Thank Allah; we had a baby-boy, Muhammad, in February 1969. We thanked Allah for the precious gift.

I worked in Lebanon in clothing trade and in premises besides my perseverance in learning about Islam. Of course, I also learned to speak informal Arabic and was able to read The Holy Quran fluently.

## The American Muslim Convert

**Abdul-Lateef Abdullah:**

- *Much of my frustration with Christianity stemmed from its lack of knowledge and guidance on the nature of God and the individual's relationship to Him.*
- *Islam's lifestyle is the straight path to true contentment, not just the sensual and superficial way of life.*
- *Islam offers the only true answer to any society's social dilemmas.*

My experience in Islam began as a graduate student in New York City in 1998. Up to that point in my life, for 25 years, I had been a Protestant Christian, but had not been practicing my religion for quite some time. I was more interested in «*spirituality*» and looking for anything that didn't have to do with organized religion. To me, Christianity was out of touch and not relevant to the times. It was hard for me to find anything in it that I could apply to my everyday life. This dissolution with Christianity led me to shun everything that claimed to be organized religion, due to my assumption that they were all pretty much the same, even if at least in terms of their lack of relevance and clarity.

Much of my frustration with Christianity stemmed from its lack of knowledge and guidance on the nature of God and the individual's relationship to Him. To me, the Christian philosophy depended on this rather bizarre intermediary relationship that we were supposed to have with Jesus, who on one hand was a man, but was also divine. For me, however, this difficult and very vague relationship with our Creator left me searching for something that could provide me with a better understanding of God and our relationship to Him. Why couldn't I just pray directly to God? Why did I have to begin and end every prayer with «*in the name of Jesus Christ?*» How can an eternal, omnipotent Creator and Sustainer also take the form of a man? Why would He need to? These were just a few of the questions that I could not resolve and come to terms with. Thus, I was hungry for a more straightforward, direct, and clear approach to religion that could provide my life with true guidance, not just dogma that was void of real knowledge based on facts.

While in graduate school, I had a Jewish roommate who was a student of martial arts. While I was living with him, he was studying an art called *silat*, a traditional Malaysian martial art that is based on the teachings of Islam. When my roommate would come home from his *silat* classes, he would tell me all about the uniqueness of *silat* and its rich spiritual dimension. As I was quite interested in learning martial arts at that time, I was intrigued by what I had heard and decided to accompany my roommate to a class one Saturday morning. Although I did not realize it at that time, my experience with Islam began that morning at my first *silat* class in New York City back on February 28th, 1998. There, I met my teacher, Cikgu (which means teacher in Malay) S., the man who would provide me with my basis and orientation to Islam. Although I thought I was beginning a career as a martial artist, that day back in 1998 really represented my first step toward becoming Muslim.



From the very beginning, I was intrigued by *silat* and Islam and began spending as much time as possible with my teacher. As my roommate and I were equally passionate about *silat*, we would go to my teacher's house and soak up as much knowledge as we could from him. In fact, upon our graduation from graduate school in the spring of 1998, upon his invitation, we spent the entire summer living with him and his wife. As my learning in *silat* increased, so did my learning about Islam, a religion that I had hardly any knowledge of prior to my experience in *silat*.

What made my orientation to Islam so powerful was that as I was learning about it, I was also living it. Because I studied at the home of my teacher, being in the presence of devout Muslims allowed me to be constantly surrounded by the sounds, sights and practices of Islam. For as Islam is an entire lifestyle, when you are in an Islamic environment, you cannot separate it from everyday life. Unlike Christianity, which tends toward a separation between daily life and religion, Islam requires its followers to integrate worship of Allah into everything we do. Thus, in living with my teacher, I was immersed in the Islamic Religion and experiencing first-hand how it can shape one's entire way of life.

In the beginning, Islam was so new, different, and powerful to me. It was also very foreign in many ways and the amount of discipline it requires was difficult to understand. At that time, I was so liberal in so many ways and was used to shunning anything dogmatic or imposed, regardless of who authored it! As time went on, however, and my understanding of Islam grew, I began to slowly see that what seemed to be religious dogma was really the lifestyle put forth to us by our Creator - or the Arabic term, «*deen*» of Allah. This lifestyle, I would later learn, is the straight path to true contentment, not just the sensual and superficial way of life that my society and culture promote. I realized that the question is quite simple actually. Who could possibly know better than the All-wise Creator, what is the best way of life for human beings?

From the day of my first *silat* class in New York City to the day I took my *shahadda*, July 30, 1999, I underwent a thorough self-examination that was comprised of two major experiences. One was the process of questioning the culture I was brought up in, and the second was struggling to understand the true nature of God and the role of religion in my everyday life. As for my culture, this one was not as difficult as most people would think. For me, growing up in America and knowing no better, it took a powerful experience, a gifted teacher, and the right knowledge to experience truth. American culture is very powerful because it constantly bombards us with sensual gratification. Unless we are removed from it, it is difficult to see its limitations, which are based on worshipping and putting faith in everything but God, the only One Who can provide us with real, lasting support in our lives.

Being a social scientist by trade, much of my time is spent working on and pondering over the ills and dilemmas of our society. As I learned more about Islam, I came to the conclusion that societal ills are based primarily on unhealthy, dysfunctional social behaviors. Since Islam is a lifestyle focused totally on the most healthy, positive way of conducting our lives in

every setting, then it is, and will always be, the only true answer to any society's social dilemmas. With this realization, not only did I decide that Islam was relevant to my everyday life, but I began to understand why it is so different from other religions. Only Islam provides knowledge and guidance for every aspect of life. Only Islam provides a way to achieve health and happiness in every dimension of life - physical, spiritual, mental, financial, etc; only Islam provides us with a clear life goal and purpose; and only Islam shows us how to live in and contribute to a community, not just talk about it. Islam is what everyone needs, and what so many who have not found it yet, are searching for. It is the path to purpose, meaning, health and happiness. This is because it is the straight path to the source of all the power we could ever need - Allah.

It was only until I actually became Muslim that I realized just how encompassing our lifestyle truly is. Literally everything we are instructed to do has one underlying purpose - to remember Allah. It just shows the absolute and divine brilliance of the «*deen*», in that there is a lifestyle that can show you how to remember your Creator in as simple an act as greeting someone, or getting dressed in the morning, or waking up from sleep. Islam shows us that by constantly remembering Allah, everything we do becomes focused on Him, and thus becomes an act of worship. From this, our energy, our thoughts, and our actions all become redirected away from unhealthy and useless causes and focused on the source of all goodness. Thus, we are continuously tapping into His divine strength, mercy and grace. So, by remembering Allah constantly, we become stronger, better, and healthier in every aspect of our lives.

There were, and still are, aspects of Islam that have proven at least somewhat difficult for me. Nevertheless, I thank Allah everyday for the ease to which he has allowed me to make the necessary changes in my life so that I can continue to live in America and still be, *Inshallah*, a good Muslim. As a white, middle-class American, many of the cultural aspects of Islam are quite different from what I, and those close to me throughout my life, have been used to. In fact, when I finally broke the news to my family that I had taken my *shahadda* and become Muslim, almost all of their questions and concerns were related to cultural differences - marriage, social life, family, etc. They were much less concerned about my general beliefs on God and religious practice. For my family, friends, and co-workers, becoming Muslim was not seen necessarily as a negative change, but it has required a great deal of education for them about Islam. In fact, as with my own education, this process of sharing the truth about Islam with them is never-ending because there is no limit to how much knowledge we can acquire, and it is the responsibility of every one of us to share whatever right knowledge we have.

Because acquiring right knowledge is such a critical component to a Muslim's development, having a teacher who has taught me how to apply Islam in everyday life has made all the difference for me and helped me in managing whatever difficulties I have experienced from my reversion. Having someone knowledgeable you can turn to whenever you have questions is a wonderful support that every new *shahadda* should go out of

their way to find. Islam is not a religion that can be rationalized, in the way that Christianity and Judaism have been over the ages. It is a clear path that must be followed exactly as Allah laid for us through the life of our beloved Prophet Muhammad (p.b.u.h.), his companions, and the saints and scholars of Islam.

In this day and age, in this society, discerning the path can often be difficult, especially when we are constantly faced with questions and doubts from people who on the surface may not be hostile to Islam, but whose general lack of faith can have a harmful effect on someone who bases everything they do on their love for Allah. It is also not easy being in an environment where we are constantly bombarded with sensual temptations which are seen as ordinary, common aspects of everyday life. But when we have the support of a knowledgeable, experienced teacher, who is able to apply the universal teachings of Islam to his life, then the truth becomes clear from error, exactly how Allah (S.W.T.) describes in The Qur'an. From this, we are able to understand how to apply Islam correctly to our own lives, and thus receive Allah's many blessings. The ultimate test, however, of anyone who claims to have true and right knowledge, is to look at how they apply it in their own lives. If their actions support their teachings, then and only then should we look to them for guidance.

My journey to Islam, although short, has been a life-altering experience. It is one that, with every passing day, makes me more and more appreciative and thankful to Almighty Allah. The extent of His mercy can only fully be understood from the perspective of someone who prostrates themselves regularly and submits their will to that of The Creator. This is what I strive for through Islam, and what the ultimate jihad is. It is the struggle that we must fight every moment of every day, but one that we love, because we know who to turn to for support and who is helping us along.

I look back at my life prior to Islam and reflect on the different ways I sought guidance. I think back to all the different ideas I once had of who God really is and how we can become close to Him. I look back now and smile and perhaps even shed a tear because now I know the truth. Through Islam, I know why so many people who do not believe have so much fear inside them. Life can be very scary without God. I know, because I once harbored that same level of fear. Now, however, I have the ultimate «self-help» program. It's the self-help program without the self. It's the path that puts everything in its proper place. Now, life makes sense. Now, life is order. Now, I know why I am here, where I want to go, what I want my life to be, how I want to live, and what is most important not just to me, but to everyone. I only hope and pray that others who have not found the path yet, can feel the same as I do. *Alhamdulillah Rabbil Aalameen.....*

## U.S. Writer Michael Wolfe

### Who Converted to Islam Says:

- *Europeans and Americans, including many who are free of racist notions, automatically class people racially; Muslims classified people by their faith and their actions.*

- *I was looking for a framework I could live with, a vocabulary of spiritual concepts applicable to the life I was living.*

- *The more I learned about Islam, the more it appeared to conform to what I was after.*

After twenty-five years as a writer in America, I wanted something to soften my cynicism. I was searching for new terms by which to see. The way one is raised establishes certain needs in this department. From a pluralist background, I naturally placed great stress on the matters of racism and freedom. Then, in my early twenties, I had gone to live in Africa for three years. During this time, which was formative for me, I did rub shoulders with blacks of many different tribes, with Arabs, Berbers, and even Europeans, who were Muslims. By and large these people did not share the Western obsession with race as a social category. In our encounters being oddly colored rarely mattered. I was welcomed first and judged on merit later. By contrast, Europeans and Americans, including many who are free of racist notions, automatically class people racially. Muslims classified people by their faith and their actions. I found this transcendent and refreshing. Malcolm X saw his nation's salvation in it. «*America needs to understand Islam,*» he wrote, «*because this is the one religion that erases from its society the race problem*».

I was looking for an escape route, too, from the isolating terms of a materialistic culture. I wanted access to a spiritual dimension, but the conventional paths I had known as a boy were closed. My father had been a Jew; my mother Christian. Because of my mongrel background, I had a foot in two religious camps. Both faiths were undoubtedly profound. Yet the one that emphasizes a chosen people I found insupportable; while the other, based in a mystery, repelled me. A century before, my maternal great-great-grand-mother's name had been set in stained glass at the high street Church of Christ in Hamilton, Ohio. By the time I was twenty, this meant nothing to me.

These were the terms my early life provided. The more I thought about it now, the more I returned to my experiences in Muslim Africa. After two return trips to Morocco, in 1981 and 1985, I came to feel that Africa, the continent, had little to do with the balanced life I found there. It was not, that is, a continent I was after, nor an institution, either. I was looking for a framework I could live with, a vocabulary of spiritual concepts applicable to the life I was living now. I did not want to «*trade in*» my culture. I wanted access to new meanings.

After a mid-Atlantic dinner I went to wash up in the bathroom. During my absence a quorum of Hasidim lined up to pray outside the door. By the time I had finished, they were too immersed to notice me. Emerging from the bathroom, I could barely work the handle. Stepping into the aisle was out of the question.

I could only stand with my head thrust into the hallway, staring at the congregation's backs. Holding palm-size prayer books, they cut an impressive figure, tapping the texts on their breast-bones as they divined. Little by little the movements grew erratic, like a mild, bobbing form of rock and roll. I watched from the bathroom door until they were finished, then slipped back down the aisle to my seat.

We landed together later that night in Brussels. Reboarding, I found a discarded Yiddish newspaper on a food tray. When the plane took off for Morocco, they were gone.

I do not mean to imply here that my life during this period conformed to any grand design. In the beginning, around 1981, I was driven by curiosity and an appetite for travel. My favorite place to go, when I had the money, was Morocco. When I could not travel, there were books. This fascination brought me into contact with a handful of writers driven to the exotic, authors capable of sentences like this, by Freya Stark:

The perpetual charm of Arabia is that the traveler finds his level there simply as a human being; the people's directness, deadly to the sentimental or the pedantic, like the less complicated virtues; and the pleasantness of being liked for oneself might, I think, be added to the five reasons for travel given me by Sayyed Abdulla, the watchmaker; *«to leave one's troubles behind one; to earn a living; to acquire learning; to practice good manners; and to meet honorable men»*.

I could not have drawn up a list of demands, but I had a fair idea of what I was after. The religion I wanted should be to metaphysics as metaphysics is to science. It would not be confined by a narrow rationalism or traffic in mystery to please its priests. There would be no priests, no separation between nature and things sacred. There would be no war with the flesh, if I could help it. Sex would be natural, not the seat of a curse upon the species. Finally, I did want a ritual component, daily routine to sharpen the senses and discipline my mind. Above all, I wanted clarity and freedom. I did not want to trade away reason simply to be saddled with a dogma.

The more I learned about Islam, the more it appeared to conform to what I was after.

Most of the educated Westerners I knew around this time regarded any strong religious climate with suspicion. They classified religion as political manipulation, or they dismissed it as a medieval concept, projecting upon it notions from their European past.

It was not hard to find a source for their opinions. A thousand years of Western history had left us plenty of fine reasons to regret a path that led through so much ignorance and slaughter. From the Children's Crusade and the Inquisition to the transmogrified faiths of Nazism and communism during our century, whole countries have been exhausted by belief. Nietzsche's fear, that the modern nation-state would become a substitute religion, had proved tragically accurate. Our century, it seemed to me, was ending in an age beyond belief, which believers inhabited as much as agnostics.

Regardless of church affiliation, secular humanism is the air westerners breathe and the lens we gaze through. Like any world view, this outlook is

pervasive and transparent. It forms the basis of our broad identification with democracy and with the pursuit of freedom in all its countless and beguiling forms.

Immersed in our shared preoccupations, one may easily forget that other ways of life exist on the same planet.

At the time of my trip, for instance, 650 million Muslims with a majority representation in forty-four countries adhered to the formal teachings of Islam. In addition, about 400 million more were living as minorities in Europe, Asia and the Americas. Assisted by postcolonial economics, Islam has become in a matter of thirty years a major faith in Western Europe. Of the world's great religions, Islam alone was adding to its fold.

My politicized friends were dismayed by my new interest. They all had universally confused Islam with the machinations of half a dozen Middle Eastern tyrants. The books they read, the new broadcasts they viewed depicted the faith as a set of political functions. Almost nothing was said of its spiritual practice. I liked to quote Mae West to them: «*Anytime you take religion for a joke, the laugh's on you*».

Historically a Muslim sees Islam as the final, matured expression of an original religion reaching back to Adam. It is as resolutely monotheistic as Judaism, whose major Prophets Islam reveres as links in a progressive chain, culminating in Jesus and Muhammad. Essentially a message of renewal, Islam has done its part on the world stage to return the forgotten taste of life's lost sweetness to millions of people. Its book, The Qur'an, caused Goethe to remark, «*You see, this teaching never fails; with all our systems, we cannot go, and generally speaking no man can go, further*».

Traditional Islam is expressed through the practice of five pillars. Declaring one's faith, prayer, charity, and fasting are activities pursued repeatedly throughout one's life. Conditions permitting, each Muslim is additionally charged with undertaking a pilgrimage to Mecca once in a lifetime. The Arabic term for this fifth rite is Hady. Scholars relate the word to the concept of *kasd*, «*aspiration*,» and to the notion of men and women as travelers on earth. In Western religions, pilgrimage is a vestigial tradition, a quaint, folkloric concept commonly reduced to metaphor. Among Muslims, on the other hand, the Hady embodies a vital experience for millions of new pilgrims every year. In spite of the modern content of their lives, it remains an act of obedience, a profession of belief, and the visible expression of a spiritual community. For a majority of Muslims the Hady is an ultimate goal, the trip of a lifetime.

As a convert I felt obliged to go to Mecca. As an addict to travel, I could not imagine a more compelling goal.

The annual, month-long fast of *Ramadan* precedes the Hady by about one hundred days. These two rites form a period of intensified awareness in Muslim society. I wanted to put this period to use. I had read about Islam; I had joined a Mosque near my home in California; I had started a practice. Now I hoped to deepen what I was learning by submerging myself in a religion where Islam infuses every aspect of existence.

I planned to begin in Morocco, because I knew that country well and because it followed traditional Islam and was fairly stable. The last place I

wanted to start was in a backwater full of uproarious sectarians. I wanted to paddle the mainstream, the broad, calm water.



## Vietnamese Muslim

**Shing Yu (Abdullah)**

**Tells the story of his conversion to Islam**

- *The day I became Muslim was the most important day of my life.*
- *I feel Allah is beside me all the time.*
- *My ultimate hope is to have numerous people the world over, particularly in Vietnam, understand the bright, beautiful qualities of the right path of Islam.*

*I testify that there is no God, but Allah, I testify that Muhammad is the Prophet of Allah.* That is the *Shahadeh* I had pronounced from the bottom of my heart in front of a crowded audience at a mosque in the Kingdom of Belgium on the 19th of May, 2000, when I just reached the age of 26.

I was born and grew up in Hanoi, Vietnam. Thanks to the blessings of Allah, I was allowed to come to Belgium in 1998 to study for the Master of Science degree in Physical Land Resources.

When I was in Vietnam, I had a very vague concept of The Creator and often felt very embarrassed to ask myself, «*Where do men and the universe come from?*» At that time, The Lord or God, Adam and Eve for me were simply the characters in children's tales. I have also been told about Allah, Muhammad, Qur'an and Muslims but I had never thought that these terms are so closely related to each other.

Among my classmates in Belgium, some adopted Christianity while some followed the religion of Islam. Many times, they have explained to me about The Lord but I did not pay attention to it. On the contrary, I even protested against it strongly. I thought to myself, «*Since they are highly educated as such, why do they believe in the items of nonsense like that?*»

I still remember, when for the first time I saw from behind a Muslim friend in the position of bowing down to pray, I thought he was looking for an object falling on the floor! Later on, when I understood the truth, I was very ashamed of my lack of knowledge.

When I was told that the Muslim population in the world are about one billion three hundred million, making one Muslim in five people, I changed from indifference to the attitude of curiosity and was moved to inquire about Islam.

My curiosity increased when I knew that The Holy Qur'an explained clearly a number of scientific phenomena and stated about the Hereafter.

I knew, moreover, that there are also a number of Muslim communities in Vietnam. This made me become even more eager to know thoroughly about Islam - a religion that has many followers who adopted and complied with a pure and respectable way of life. I thought there must be some miracles that make Muslims acquire such a firm faith.

I started inquiring about this religion in September 1999. The more I've learnt, the more I appreciated Islam and realized that Muslims live very sincerely and possess many qualities that make me respect them. The more I extended the relations with Muslims, the more it confirmed my unshakeable sentiment towards Islam.

Many times, I have asked myself whether The Lord would really exist. How can we believe in Allah while we cannot see Him by our own eyes? In

spite of plenty of modern equipment, we are still not able to see The Lord. I was thinking over this every day and night in order to look for an appropriate answer for myself.

Later, I found out that although being unable to see The Lord, men can still perceive His Existence from their heart. This is like when we see a painting. We only feel the thoughts or theme of the painter in our mind but we do not pick them up directly from the painting. Yet, if men can see and recognize The Lord in person (like in bone and flesh), then is it true that The Lord is similar to the creatures that He creates? No, and that is the essence of Islam. The Lord is never represented for worship under the forms of statues that are molded by men themselves.

In the process of inquiring about Islam, I have received that encouragement, the whole-hearted assistance, and guidance of brothers and sisters-in-Islam the world over, particularly the Vietnamese-speaking Muslims.

I had the good blessing of obtaining a Vietnamese translation of The Holy Qur'an in March. After reading The Holy Qur'an, I believed entirely in Allah (*Subhanahu wa Ta'Ala* all glory be with the Highest Lord) as the Creator and Lord of the universe.

The contents of The Qur'an are indeed the Words of Allah that were revealed to Nabi Muhammad (peace and blessing of Allah be upon him).

I believe that Islam is the religion of Eternal Truth that is very close to life. I've decided to follow Islam and to become a Muslim without further delay, not even for another minute or second.

The day I became Muslim was the most important day of my life. In my life from now on, I may see the light of Truth of Islam thus ending the period of darkness and ignorance. I feel peaceful and joyful since my mind had a firm support. I am very honored and proud when I became a Muslim. My person has undertaken major changes. Previously, I often drank alcohol and beer during the time of joy and sadness. I lied without shame, and when I did something, it was just for my own interest. I never thought of anything good or bad, and I was very afraid of death! Now, I am completely different. I feel Allah is beside me all the time; He sees me, listens to me, and knows all my thoughts. This makes me become a good and pious person. Although I feel very regretful for what I had wrongfully done previously, I still have a peace of mind for, indeed, Allah is The Most Generous and The Most Merciful.

I have an ultimate hope, that is, to do in such a way as to have numerous people the world over, particularly in Vietnam, understand the bright, beautiful qualities of the right path of Islam and to become Muslim the same way as Allah has guided and directed me.

## Hungarian Muslim Brother

**Robert Manias** says:

- *My grandfather, a Protestant priest, encouraged me to look for the truth and blessed my conversion to Islam.*
- *In order to probe the secrets of this religion and discover its noble contents, I spent years in Egypt, Syria, and Lebanon where I studied Arabic and the faith.*
- *Islam goes beyond the «I» towards a wider and farther horizon that includes the other, who is to me either a brother in faith or a peer in humanity.*

**Robert was born and raised by a religious Christian family of a Catholic father and a Protestant mother. They lived in Budapest, Hungary. The great turn in this 30-year-old, truth-seeking, young man has been caused by his maternal grandfather, a Protestant priest who was well-informed about the other religions of Judaism, Buddhism, and Islam.**

### **What can you tell us about the beginning of your march, and what about that relationship between you and your grandfather?**

I was so attached to him; he was my pacemaker, I went with him wherever he went although I was a small boy, and he had the same feelings towards me. He always talked to me about the Christian doctrine and the other eastern faiths, choosing the wise sayings and the moral lessons from them and telling me to memorize them. He sometimes told me stories of heroism, patience, and sacrifice, and I memorized them and told them to my family and friends who gathered around me and listened in admiration. I felt overwhelming joy - although I did not realize the deep meaning of my grandfather's stories that I was telling.

When I was sixteen, I felt the beginning of a strange turn when he spoke out frankly to me about his doubts concerning the doctrine.

«Son,» he told me, *«I see contradictions to which I can find no answers.»*

*«I asked many people with whom I engaged in dialogues and read many books but could not find a convincing meaning for this doctrine of trinity,»* he added.

Then I realized that my grandfather was troubled by the three hypostasis issue as he wondered, *«How can part of the Lord get into Jesus, and then the latter dies?»*

In the beginning, I tried to ignore the severity of these embarrassing questions, but my efforts were in vain, for they chased me at every occasion. Soon doubts crawled into me, and I became a partner to my grandfather in the agony of seeking the truth.

*«You can't settle for doubt alone,»* he told me one day, *«you have to look for answers to these paradoxes in our faith.»* Then he gave me some books about Christianity, Judaism, and Islam. They were written in German. I read them passionately, and whenever I finished a chapter, I had a conversation with my grandfather about the explanations and problematic issues in them. This made me uncertain about all that I had believed was sacred.

However, these books did not satisfy me; on the contrary, they increased my uncertainty. Then my grandfather sensed my anxiety; he said he feared that he had burdened me with more than I could take, but I asserted my resolve and insistence to reach an answer that satisfied me. He looked at me with pride and advised me to consult with other clerics and hold dialogues with them perhaps I could get to a logical explanation of religion.

Indeed, my grandfather's advice paved the way to a splendid experience in which I met clerics from other faiths, including some Muslims in Hungary. I spent a long time holding dialogues with them and asking them about their beliefs pertaining to The Lord, prophecy, prophets, and their holy books. I noted and recorded the things that I saw as unique in their answers. I later compared my notes with my creed about Divinity and sought assistance from my grandfather who spared no effort in gathering those scattered bits of information and comparing them with what is stated in our Holy Book.

### **Were there other factors that assisted you in the journey for the Truth?**

Yes. When I went to college, my choice of History as a major was a major factor in accumulating my information and widening my horizons concerning religions and peoples in the old and modern worlds. I had a yearning to see what was overseas, for books no longer benefited me as I had to examine the Truth firsthand and see it amidst people who articulate it and act in line with it. Therefore, I had a great desire to cross the borders and travel.

The first country I visited was Egypt where I talked to everyone and benefited from some simple answers regarding the creed issue which concerned me. In 1992, I traveled to Syria where I found the people to be large-hearted and the *Ulama* humble and patient when it came to my sometimes embarrassing questions. During my meetings and dialogues that took place in mosques, I started to get some of the convincing answers that my grandfather had been looking for concerning monotheism, prophecy and prophets.

I returned to Hungary wanting to bring out before my grandfather what I understood about monotheism, prophecy and inspiration. During my studies, I spent some time at the Islamic Association in Hungary, a body that had been established by Islamic communities. I spent all my time reading and researching until 1995, the year in which I declared my embracing of Islam.

### **What impact did your conversion to Islam have on your family and on those who knew you?**

Then my grandfather was still alive. When I told him that I had become a Muslim, he was pleased. He said, «*Thank God, you have found what pacifies your heart.*» The paradox, however, was that my grandfather did not convert to Islam. This remains an enigma to me, for I asked him about that, but he did not answer me. As for my family, they did not oppose my decision; they even came closer to my ideas as we engaged in prolonged discussions.

### **What were the steps you took to gain more Islamic education and sciences?**

When I embraced Islam, I felt that I did not reach the goal, but rather the starting point. The beginning for me was over, and I had to embark on the tougher mission, that is to probe the secrets of this religion and discover its noble and sublime contents. I realized very well that this can only be achieved through gaining the introduction to this faith and the keys to understanding its texts in their original language. That is why I spent all my time in studying the Arabic language in some public schools that had been established by some orientalist in Hungary. Later, I traveled to Damascus again and joined an institute that teaches Arabic to foreigners and which is under the supervision of the Higher Education Ministry in Syria. I spent a whole year learning Arabic and its principles. My teacher who was brilliant and distinguished with his scientific and systematic style increased my love to Arabic.

I returned to Hungary and looked for the sites of the Muslim communities. I approached them to maintain some worshipping duties and ethical practices that Islam ordered. Besides, my relationship with them enabled me to speak Arabic and increase my knowledge about that language. At that time, I was considering studying religious studies in one of our neighboring countries, such as Austria where there are institutes for studying Islamic *Sharia*; however, I preferred to study amidst an Islamic and Arab milieu to benefit more from being close to the Islamic daily life. Therefore, I had to wait for another three years which I concluded with getting my higher studies degree in History.

In 1998, a Divine Providence enabled me to meet a Lebanese man residing in Hungary. I told him about my wish to study Islam, so he suggested that I travel with him to Lebanon. There, I met honorable *Ulama* and embarked upon the journey of learning and science. It was a tough journey in which I encountered many challenges because I had chosen a milieu that was completely different from my own. Nevertheless, I benefited a lot from my religious studies that implanted in me new senses about life and man. During that journey, I was accompanied by a Philosophy professor who has opened before me horizons concerning this great religion that answered my anxious questions.

### **How do you view your experience with Islam up till now, and how do you determine the responsibilities you shoulder towards your faith?**

I feel that my experience has been successful as it widened my ideas about Islam and Muslims, but I must not settle for this personal experience and consider it an individualistic salvation, for Islam has taken me beyond this «I» towards a wider and farther horizon that includes the other, who is to me either a brother in faith or a peer in humanity. These are the principles of Islam and its sublime human ethics, and they make me more aware of my duty and responsibility towards my family, relatives, and society: to deliver to them the message of Islam that Allah has bestowed upon me.

### **The Hungarian Muslims' Association**

For the sake of these sublime principles, we are now seeking to establish institutes and libraries in Budapest to help us spread awareness about Islam and the Seal (the last) of the Prophets (p.b.u.h.) among the people. Currently we are teaching Arabic in the association, and everybody (Muslims and non-Muslims) can benefit from this service in many domains.

### **Do you have any special interests other than those blessed activities which you have just mentioned?**

As for my occupation, I write in HVG, Hungary's largest magazine, about religious culture and Islamic thought. I take interest in the important events in contemporary history, such as the Islamic Revolution in Iran. I also mind special attention to the Islamic rituals (the two Eids, the Holy Month of *Ramadan*) and try to tell my society in Hungary what they mean.

## Armenian Muslim Brother

**Nobar Klislian** says:

- *Having read The Holy Quran several times, I realized that it was a Divine Book and that it could not be written by a human being; therefore, I embraced Islam.*

- *One of the characteristics of The Holy Quran is that it suits every time and place, and the more you read it, the more new things you discover in it.*

- *I wish that Muslim preachers and Ulama would urge people to read and learn besides deducing the meanings of The Holy Quran, for they are the Ummah of «Read».*

- *The only attribute that I like to be called with is that I am one of «the people of The Quran».*

**Noor Al-Islam Magazine** is glad, in this part that hosts converted brothers and sisters whom Allah has delighted their hearts with Islam and the light of the Clear Right, to publish (not literally) this valuable interview which was made by Sister Nadia Sultan with the Armenian brother who has converted to Islam Nobar Klislian in order to benefit its readers.

The interview was published in the Arabic language magazine Sada al-Mashreq in Canada, where Brother Klislian currently resides and continues his activity of invitation to Islam and distinguished intellectual work.

*First, we would like to welcome you as a good Muslim and active brother for the sake of Islam as far as invitation, thought, and writing are concerned. Could you please tell us about your upbringing, academic and occupational life?*

I was born in the Syrian town of Aleppo in 1942. I grew up there, and when I reached the college level I moved to study in Lebanon at the American University in Beirut from which I got my Masters degree in Mathematics. Between 1962 and 1976, I taught in the Lebanese University, Beirut College for Girls, the American University in Beirut, Jan American and other schools.

In 1976, when the Lebanese civil war broke out, I immigrated with my wife and children, who were then six and three years old, to Canada. I worked in marketing machinery and then in the commerce of precious stones. In 1982, I worked in real estate. Later, I taught mathematics to the children of those whom I knew of the Arab and Armenian communities as a volunteer.

In 1990, I came second in selling real estate in Canada's Hall of Fame Remax, and fourth at the international level.

### **Can we talk about the beginnings? How did you embrace Islam?**

I had a Muslim friend of Arab origin who presented me with a translation of The Holy Quran by Thomas Irving, which I believe is the best English translation of The Holy Quran, because he has used the simple and understandable language of North America. Then I read the Arabic version of The Holy Quran over twenty times. I realized that this book is a Divine Book, and that it could not be a «human production». In the meantime, I also read Mohammed Assad's The Message of Islam. Therefore, I decided



to embrace Islam and to translate The Holy Quran into the Armenian language.

### **How was this task, and how long did the translation take?**

Of course it wasn't an easy task. I relied in my work in a balanced fashion on the English translation of The Holy Quran and the Arabic original one. I also used Assad's book and A-Tabarai's interpretation which was quite useful, although I disagree with him on some points. I needed five years to complete the translation, that is from May 1997 until April 2002.

You said that when you read The Holy Quran you realized beyond doubt that it was a Divine word and not a human production. Can you tell us about this certainty?

**First**, the miracle of The Holy Quran is that it is not restricted to a period of time. Human beings are able to understand it and apply it now, after over one thousand four hundred years since it was first revealed.

**Second**, any encyclopedia, even if it is made of thousands of pages, will include defects. Whereas The Holy Quran, with its thirty chapters, answers all the questions that may come to one's mind; it's a complete and comprehensive coverage of the human being's needs; it has no inadvertence or negligence in any topic that is of interest to man be it in his or her worldly life or what awaits them after death.

**Third**, the miracle of The Holy Quran lies also in the fact that the more you read it, the more new things you discover in it. Even if you read it hundreds of times, you will not be bored; this serves as categorical evidence that it is Divine and that it was not written by a human being.

### **What do you think about Islam and Muslims today?**

Pertaining to Muslims, I have a two-part answer.

**First**, since I converted to Islam, I have taken part in the Friday Prayer. I really find it strange how none of the preachers have ever talked in his Khotba about instructing and urging Muslims to read, although the first verse that was revealed was «Read». I wish that Friday preachers would return Muslims to the origin and essence of Islam through urging people to read and learn besides deducing the meanings of The Holy Quran, for they are the Ummah of «Read»; otherwise, George Bernard Shaw's remark, that they are the worst implementers of the Best Book that have ever been revealed to humanity, The Holy Quran, will hold good for them, because they do not read.

**Second**, as for my opinion on Muslims in general, well, many people come to me, because I have embraced Islam, to ask me this question, I reply that I do not have the answer to this question, for to judge people, be they Muslims or non-Muslims, is up to their Creator, be He exalted. Allah has pointed out in The Holy Quran that human beings are completely free in this worldly life whether they follow or ignore the teachings of The Holy Quran. However, they will return to Allah in the Hereafter, and He will judge them.

Regarding Islam, Islam is The Quran, and I am trying to follow its teachings as much as I can. And I can always discuss its topics with anyone, for Allah has recommended the Shura (consultation) and allowed dialogue and exchanging ideas and opinions.

**Is there in the horizon any other works other than your translation of The Holy Quran?**

Yes, I am currently writing a book which I titled *The Creation: Planned or Random?* The book is in English. It tackles many issues including, for instance, Water: The Holy Quran states that water is the source of life; but in order to remain fit and suitable to supply the living people, animals, and plants, water has to be in a condition that enables it to perform this task, as it needs to be liquid, not vapor or frozen. The whole universe has been made subservient to achieve this liquid state of the water in order to enable it to perform this task. This is clear in many aspects: the size of the earth, its gravity, its farness from each of the sun and the moon, its rotation, the wind movement... Even storms serve this end. In the past, I used to fear storms and hate them until I knew that they cleanse the environment of pollution and contribute in environmental balance.

In the end of each chapter of my new book, there is a question that I raise before the reader: is it a coincidence or is there an upper hand that plans and works to achieve balance on earth in order to preserve life?

**Did your upbringing in an Arab country have any role in your decision to embrace Islam?**

Not at all. The opposite is right. The major influence was when I read The Holy Quran. However, after I embraced Islam, I began to feel sympathy with Muslims throughout the world where Muslims are being persecuted.

## ... And I Became Zeinab Ramirez

Filipino Sister Zeinab (Teresa) says:

### Interviewed by Salma Bitar

- *I had misconceptions about Islam, but having studied its creeds and conceptions, I admired this great faith.*
- *I admired the hijab of the sisters I saw due to its modesty, solemnity, and spirituality.*
- *What I have obtained through embracing Islam is more precious than all the jewels of the world, and I fear that Satan may steal it from me.*

**Dear Sister Zeinab Ramirez (Teresa before embracing Islam) welcome to the heaven of Islam. We praise Allah Who has guided you and us to His Right Path. I will ask you a few questions that will tell us about your march towards the world of Guidance and your life before being guided. Could you tell us about your life before becoming a Muslim?**

*I am a Filipino; I was born in the capital Manila away from the Islamic areas. I was born to a Catholic family. My father died when I was six years old. My mother and brother sustained me. I finished school and got my BS in Computer Sciences in 1984; then I worked in a travel agency. I used to go to church and attended sessions of studying and analyzing the Bible. At this time, I believed Muslims were bad people who did not know the Creator and killed people and that we should guide them to Christianity.*

I met my husband who was an Engineering student and taught him English. A few months later, he proposed to me. I agreed to marry him without knowing that he was Muslim, for I had never asked him about his faith. I found out that he was Muslim when he told me he went to the mosque for prayer. As for him, he never opposed my going to church and practicing my Christian rituals. He was very high-minded and understanding.

### **When was your first step on the Path of Guidance, and what made you take it?**

After we got married, I got to know Islam through my husband. We discussed our faiths; he told me about Islam, and I told him about Christianity. I realized that the conceptions I had about Islam were wrong. This made me want to know more about the creeds, principles, and conceptions of this faith.

### **How did you become fully convinced that you needed to embrace Islam?**

My husband started to bring me English books about Islam, its Prophet (p.b.u.h.), and *Ahlul-Bait* (a.s.). The more I read, the more my interest and my liking of knowledge about Islam grew; I felt that my mind accepted the doctrines of this religion and that I have become fully convinced that it was the Right Religion. I took part in Islamic sessions and felt relaxed there. I admired the *hijab* of the sisters I saw due to its modesty, solemnity, and spirituality.

**Having had that conviction, what was the next step?**

The next step was to seriously consider declaring my conversion to Islam, wearing *hijab*, and performing the religious duties ordained by Allah. I changed my name from Teresa to Zeinab and asked my husband to teach me how to pray. I observed how he prayed and then started praying with him. I was then the mother of a four-year-old child.

**What was the reaction of your Christian milieu then?**

My mother did not oppose my embracing Islam; she was not prejudiced against this faith (in fact I was surprised when I knew later that she knew about the Muslims' holidays, prayers, and fasting). Unfortunately, nevertheless, she did not know the reality and essence of Islam. As for my friends, they felt sad and thought that I had gone astray; they started warning me against Satan and told me that he had controlled me to relinquish the faith of my fathers and grandfathers. Of course I did not care about their attitude and did what satisfied my conscience, mind, and heart.

**Having been in the World of Right for over 12 years now, how do you feel?**

I feel satisfied with what I did. I sense peace of mind and stability. I pray to the Most Gracious every day after I perform my prayers to render my guidance unwavering, for what I have obtained is more precious than all the jewels of the world, and I fear that Satan may steal it from me.

**How do you face the mistakes made by some Muslims? And how do you feel then?**

I notice that these people are behaving in contrast with Allah's orders and the teachings of their faith. Besides, I try to forgive those who are unjust to me, as Allah (be He exalted) has ordered me, if any injustice is inflicted on me.

**Do you have any advice to your fellow Muslims?**

I would like to advise them to always remember that their faith is that of the nobility of character (Prophet Mohammed (p.b.u.h.) has said, «*I was sent to perfect the nobility of character*»). I hope that every Muslim observes the meaning of the religious duties and the deeds that are desirable that they perform; I mean the symbolic connotations of these duties that give them a greater spiritual and behavioral dimension. I also ask them to pray for me.

## Australian Guided Sister Fatima

(Formerly Antoinette) Says:

- *My path to Islam was full of suffering.*
- *I thank Allah for the grace of guiding me to this Great Faith.*

This is another story of a young woman who is western in culture, affiliation, and way of living, and who has rested with relief on the shores of Islam while enjoying the religion's safety after she was guided to its Light by the ship of seeking the True Religion that has answers to the questions of the puzzled minds and sends reassurance into anxious hearts.

Here she is, telling her story of embracing Islam and the suffering and obstacles she encountered for that sake. She expressed the satisfaction and happiness she feels with her new faith in the following letter that she has sent to *Noor al-Islam*. She began her tale with the following Quranic verse:

As quoted in The Holy Quran, {*All praise and thanks be to Allah, who guided us to this and never could we have found guidance, were it not that Allah had guided us*}. (7:43)

Truly thanks and praise be to Allah (s.w.t.) alone, who guided me towards His light from sheer darkness. I was born in a Catholic family where I was taught excellent morals and values. My siblings and I were expected to attend church every Sunday, and believe me we would hear it from my mother if we didn't! Going to church used to make me feel a sense of peace, like I had achieved something good. Although I would hardly pay attention I felt like I was pleasing God so that made me happy.

Growing up in an area where Muslims and Christians mixed, Islam was not too foreign to me. Some Muslim friends I had explained to me their views on God and Jesus and how they differ to what I was taught. I didn't think much into it at that time as I was still immature and wanted to live my life the way it was.

Until one Sunday when I was at the age of 21 years. I attended church as usual. I recall sitting there when the questions started hitting me! How is God and Jesus the same person? One minute, Jesus is the son; the next, he is God!? How did Jesus' dying on the cross save me from hell when I still sin everyday? All of a sudden, all of this didn't make any sense to me. Why haven't I asked myself these questions before? I just realized I was doing what I was taught to do without thinking all my life, which is not my usual character. At this point, I remembered what my Muslim friends had told me about Islam's views on Jesus and Mary. I started thinking about why God divided us into different religions on earth. What was His plan? Why didn't He make us all the same? It was then that I realized I had to find out about different religions and see which one was correct.

During the mid semester break of my last year of university, I got a temporary full time job as a secretary for 6 weeks. My job was not very demanding, so I spent most of the day searching the Internet for answers to my questions. I quickly discarded Judaism as correct as it does not believe in Jesus or Mary, and I found that Islam acknowledges them and praises them.

Slowly my questions were being answered, and I was beginning to feel satisfied and content with the principles of Islam. Everything had a perfect

explanation and a logical answer. I realized I couldn't deny the truth in front of me, so I decided to embrace Islam.

That night I went home and said the *Shahadda* in my bedroom all alone. This was the beginning of my secret life as a Muslim for the time being. I grew more and more in love with Islam; I was learning new things every day. I had confided in one Muslim friend only as I knew if my family found out it will cause a major problem which I was not strong enough to deal with yet. I was praying and fasting in my house without the knowledge of my family. Only with Gods' protection was I able to do that for 3 years.

In my quest for knowledge, I started searching for an Islamic center, which could offer me more. I came across the Imam Hussein Centre, which I can now truly say established a real foundation in my life. I owe many thanks to this center and its principle, Sheik Mansour Leghaei, who became my spiritual guide from this moment on and who guided me through the struggles in my life. At this centre, I started to realize what Islam really is as my knowledge and faith expanded beyond my expectations.

After my 4th practicing *Ramadan*, I decided to gradually break the news to my mother, who at this stage was getting suspicious of my changes in dress and attitude. She didn't know how to take the news, so she went to others for help. This caused the whole family to get involved resulting in a backlash against me. They told me I had to be Catholic and that I was being brain-washed and all Muslims are bad. They had commanded me to throw out all my long sleeve clothes, and if I wanted to go out anywhere it would be supervised by a member of my family. The lock on my bedroom door was removed, and at that point, I knew I could not stay there any longer, as I was now unable to practice my religion.

The next day, I secretly grabbed some of my belongings and went off to work as usual. I called my mother during the day and advised her that I wanted to come home and be with her but everyone getting involved has made it too difficult for me to live my life as I wanted. I explained to her that I was living as a Muslim under her roof for the past 3 years, and it had not affected anyone, so why should it now. But I knew nothing would be the same again. My family members hold their traditions close and to my extended family, it was as if I had betrayed them and went with the enemy.

I found a place to stay, but the hardest thing I had to do was living alone. I knew my mother wanted me home so desperately but my brother would not allow me to come home unless it was under his conditions. I knew I could never abandon God or the path He has set out for me, so I just had to resist my family although it was hurting me. My spiritual guide told me something that very first day that stayed with me forever. He said, «*Hold onto the firm hand of God, and you will be successful and win your family back too one day*». So I did just that; I struggled against my family for almost a year on my own. I occasionally saw my Mother and sisters who always spoke to me but had a hard time accepting and understanding my conversion. This became more complicated when I decided to wear the *Hijab*!

*Hijab* was always on the back of my mind, and I had felt guilty for some time now for not wearing it. But living at my home with a Catholic family I

had no other choice at that point. But now that I had left home and all were aware that I had embraced Islam, I felt I had no excuse in front of God anymore. So with the help from my spiritual guide I decided to wear *Hijab* and face the battle with my family.

This step caused a greater backlash within the family. They all of a sudden didn't care that I was Muslim but just didn't want me to show it to anyone! I didn't see my family for 3 months but had constant phone contact with them. Most of the time, it was people calling and abusing me for being «*selfish*». No one could understand that I was not harming anyone if I was practicing the laws of God and that we could all live peacefully together if they would allow it. But the main problem was dealing with the wider Catholic community and all the criticism my family had to face.

Even though this was the most depressing and lonely and hardest time of my life, I felt so close to God. I was in constant communication with Him. I felt most comfort in the *dua* book of Imam Zein Al-Aabideen «*The Psalms of Islam*». Each night I would read a *dua* from this book asking God to help me through this hard time and never let me give up. From his beautiful words and guidance, I feel a special connection with Imam Zein Al-Aabideen. I was mentally struggling as this issue did not change for a while and neither did the situation with my family.

Until I met my husband and decided to get married, that's when things started to improve. Up until this point my extended family constantly pressured my mother to try and change my mind about Islam, as I was still under her «*guardianship*» in their mind. Once I was married, that expectation from my mother was lifted which relieved her tremendously.

My mother is now one of my strongest supporters and is seeing Islam with a new light. I see my sisters frequently, although my 2 younger brothers still do not want to speak to me and refuse to see me with *hijab*. I only communicate with a handful of my extended family, as most are still outraged at my conversion.

In my opinion, I did not lose anything as I made other family from the Imam Hussein Islamic Centre and with my husband, which makes up for everything.

As my spiritual guide advised me, I held to the strong hand of God and in the end God increased my faith in Him and rewarded me.

Looking back at my years of hardship, I am so thankful to Allah for putting me through this test, as it made me stronger as a person and increased my faith in Him. Without trials there is no reward, and without hardship we cannot elevate ourselves spiritually.



## Warton Kirbassi

(Hussein Ithna Ashari):

• *Miracle of Imam Hussein (A.S.) and my readings have led me to embrace Islam.*

**Warton Kirbassi is a western man as for birth, raising and way of thinking. His heart and mind were touched by the lights of Islam; thus he was guided to the Right Faith, went on deepening his knowledge about it, and started inviting people to embrace it.**

### Birth and Raising

Brother Warton Kirbassi was born in the French village of Fontainebleau, around 50 kilometers from Paris. He finished his academic studies in the Teachers' College. In 1951, he left France to Britain to specialize in Radio and Electrical Engineering. He stayed in France for four years and a few months before he returned to Paris.

### Another Journey

Warton did not stay in France for a long time as he signed in 1956 a one-year contract with an airlines company in Mehrabad International Airport in the Iranian capital, Tehran. He worked in the technical division.

When the contract period ended, Warton preferred to stay in Iran where he spent three years working as a translator in different commercial institutions.

Warton Kirbassi spent his spare time in Iran in reading and studying the Islamic faith in general and the Shia confession in particular. Furthermore, he has read The Holy Quran several times to examine its treasures.

### Providence Will

Providence has chosen that he sustain a fatal disease. As days passed, the severity and pains of the illness increased, along with the suffering. In light of the examinations he had, doctors decided that he must undergo surgery. In spite of this he did not let despair control him; he kept hoping that he would be cured.

### The Turning Point

The severity of the suffering coincided with the month of Muharam. Warton says, *«Next to me was a large house prepared for marking the occasion of Ashura. Maatam were held at night and addresses were made in which the disasters [inflicted on Ahlul-Bait] were recalled.*

*«One night, one of those serving in the Maatam offered me a cup of tea. 'Sir, would you like to drink the tea of Imam Hussein (a.s.)?' he asked me. I accepted his invitation with extreme longing and will. When my lips touched that tea, I felt a striking light in my mind. Then, I whispered to my Lord, 'O God, by the sanctity and stature of Imam Hussein, show me a unique miracle so as to be relieved of these pains and the severity of this illness'.*

*«When I got up the next day, I saw a wonderful thing: the miracle happened and I was cured!*

*«My previous readings about Islam and this amazing incident, which my eyes have witnessed, had a great impact on me; therefore, I decided to embrace Islam».*

Afterwards, he went to the Holy City of Qom and declared the two testimonies (that there is no god but Allah, and that Mohammed (p.b.u.h.) is his servant and apostle) in front of one of the major *Ulama* (clerics). He chose the name of Hussein Ithna Ashari.

## She Followed the Call of Her Heart

### A Polish Lady's journey to Islam

**This is the warm journey of the Polish woman, Kamila Rozniata, to Islam through which she wants everyone to know the story of her conversion to Great Islam which attracted her with its spirituality and enchanting teachings the minute she started knowing what it was. With this warmth and zeal, she tells us the story of her embracing Islam and what she encountered in this path.**

Allah (*Subhanahu wa ta'ala*) created human being with his free will to be able to make his own decision and choose his own destiny; but I believe that our path of life was planned even before our birth, and we - through our choices - can make it worse or better.

Each human being also is born as a Muslim, and his parents choose his religion and teach him their own tradition and customs.

I came from strong Polish Catholic family. We used to go to the church every Sunday and celebrate holidays together. Since I remember I used to join the prayers mostly as an obligation than a call of my heart even though I didn't ask any questions or search for something deeper. It was enough, I believed; I had some basic knowledge, I had good relation with my family, and I enjoyed the life. I was a happy 25 years old girl.

Then I left my homeland and moved to Connecticut, USA. Here, for the first time, I heard about Islam. It was year 2001 and I was working between Muslim people. We started talking about our religious backgrounds, and I was surprised that in Islam I could find things which I already knew - about creation, prophets or even Mary and the birth of Jesus. I really enjoyed all those conversations. At the beginning, I tried to convince them that my religion is better but soon I realized that I cannot find any more arguments. I needed knowledge so as to find the truth; I read a lot about comparing both religions. At the beginning, I was really scared and confused. I didn't know where I belong: I gave up my old practices including prayers and attending church, and I couldn't find myself in Islam yet. I was stuck. I would like to pray, and I didn't know how. My friend told me: Clear your heart, and ask God in your own words to guide you and to show you the truth. And Allah *Subhanahu wa ta'ala* gave me the answer. I had a dream in which I heard the most important words in Islam - *la ilaha illa Allah* [there's no god but Allah]. At this time, I didn't know the exact meaning of those words, and when I found out that they meant there is no god but Allah, I knew that I was going in the good direction.

It took me one year to say *shahadah* [Testimony of Faith] because it was hard to accept or understand some of the Islamic rules, especially *hijab*. I was looking forward to change my life, but I was afraid of my parents and other peoples' reactions. Besides, I felt like I didn't have enough knowledge, and I would like to prepare myself to be a Muslim. So, I learnt how to pray and say the most important words in Arabic. I was fasting, and I kept reading to know as much as possible. Practically, I was already a Muslim. I just needed to say: «*Ashhadu anna la ilaha illa Allah wa ashhadu anna Muhammadan Rasu-lul Allah*». And I did *Alhamdulillah*. I chose the

Holy Month of *Ramadan* - December 2002 - to clear my past in front of Allah (*Subhanahu wa ta'ala*) and pray as a Muslim in the Holy night Laylat Al-Qadr [The Night of Power]. From this time, I was born again and *Ramadan* became the month of changes. One year later, I started wearing *hijab*, *Alhamdulillah*.

Being in a different country, far away from my family, I was able to be responsible for my own future and to search for the meaning of life in my own way. For my parents, it was kind of a shock, as their only little, loving daughter was looking for something strange and difficult to understand. When I started reading about Islam, I was so excited that I would like to share with my parents everything I experienced. Unfortunately it was a big mistake. For them, Islam was something wrong, dangerous, and disrespectful for human being. Even though I tried to show them positive aspects, they didn't listen. They just paid attention to the media. They thought I was in a sect, and somebody was washing my brain. The more I was talking the more trouble I was getting into. I don't remember how many phone calls I made to convince them that I was right, that I could be able to choose my own way no matter what other people think. It was so painful. We were arguing, crying, saying sorry and arguing again. It was hard especially for my Mom. She told me that I'm hurting her so much, I'm putting knife to her heart, and I'm turning my back to all what she taught me and what I saked from her milk. Then, 2 weeks after my conversion, my father came to USA because he wanted to change me but he didn't know that I'm a Muslim already. After so many arguments, I decided to keep quiet and when I gain some knowledge and experience, I shall show them the truth. It was really a difficult time for me. I wasn't able to pray without hiding. My father took me to the church to talk with a priest. *Subhan Allah* [Glory be to Allah], they couldn't answer any of my questions; they said that you don't even need to understand anything, you just need to believe. He even moved me to a different state so I would be far away from my Muslim friends. A couple of times I was thinking to give up and stop hurting my parents and do what they expect me to do. But then I remembered the life of Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) and his companions, *Subhan Allah*. After all, the pain and insult they had to go through to survive and bring Islam to us, my problems became not important.

*Alhamdulillah*, I survived also. I came back to Connecticut and in March 2003, I married one of my Muslim friends - brother Hisham from Morocco. My husband gave me guidance and knowledge about Islam. He showed me different ways of worshiping Allah (*Subhanahu wa ta'ala*). We prayed together, made dhikr [remembrance of Allah], read different *Hadiths* and Qur'an. Day by day, my faith grew as a beautiful flower and fulfilled all my heart. I realized how much I lost in my life before when I didn't know this feeling. I became calm and more patient. Every single minute, I keep watching and wondering about Allah's creation. Although the situation with my parents got worse, I could find peace and support in Islam. I was asking Allah (*Subhanahu wa ta'ala*) that maybe one day they will understand and accept my decision.

Time goes by and I enjoyed being a Muslim. I started to taste life; my face was always lit up with a smile. Everything around seemed to be beautiful and easy. I felt like somebody added wings for me so I could fly, and I had so much energy. At this time, I met a lot of Muslims who gave me pieces of advice and showed what Islam is really about in every aspect of life - especially sisters who widely opened their door and hearts for me. I was touched so deeply by their discipline, respect, and warm and open heart. Even when you met them for the first time, you feel like you know them for ages, you belong to them, and you are important. This is a beauty of Islam *Mashallah* [whatever Allah wills], and I'm asking Allah (*Subhanahu wa ta'ala*) for everybody to taste it.

In October 2004, Allah (*Subhanahu wa ta'ala*) gave me a wonderful gift - a child, a boy named Mohammed Karim. This miracle of life opened the door to better relationship with my parents. *Alhamdulillah*, they realized that I'm happy, I have a good husband, and I really enjoy the life in my way - nobody is pushing me to the decision I made. We broke the ice and started talking honestly about feelings and changes in our life. I found out how hard it was for my parents to accept the new me. They thought they lost me, and they needed to discover me again. For them, everything was Arabic or Islamic - their daughter's dress, their grandson's name... So where is the space for their tradition and religious celebration? I try my best to show them that I'm still their little girl, I love them so much, and if I change, I change to be a better person. I talk to them very often and send pictures - even those which they didn't like so much - with a scarf, so they will be part of our life and feel informed about everything. *Alhamdulillah*, they accepted all my family and me as Muslims, although, in their heart, they are still praying for me to come back to my old path.

*Alhamdulillah*, Allah (*Subhanahu wa ta'ala*) chose for me to be a Muslim. I'm so happy with all my decisions that I will never go back. May Allah (*Subhanahu wa ta'ala*) protect me from going astray and strengthen my will to remain firm on His path.

Every day I try my best to be a good servant of Allah (*Subhanahu wa ta'ala*) and build up my faith. I keep worshiping Him, following the Sunnah of Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) and educating myself about Islam. Recently I started learning reading The Qur'an in Arabic, *Alhamdulillah*. Like every human being, I have ups and downs. I struggle with the whispering of Satan and the weakness of my soul. This is my jihad which helps me to improve myself and remind me where I came from and where I'm going to.

## **American Muslim** Tahira Conant

**(Formerly Jennifer)** says:

- *I felt as if I found something linking me to the Muslims' World as I had been looking for a meaning of this life, and I found it in Islam.*
- *I cannot overlook our situation, as Muslims, for I see distance between Islam and many of those who associate themselves with it.*

**We met her in a modest house in Beirut's Suburbs. She welcomed us and received us in a room in whose corners were some books and papers that indicate to the beholder that the owner is fond of looking for the truth. We directly asked her about the beginning of her journey with Islam and her social and family situation then, besides her wandering in several countries until she chose Lebanon as another of her exploratory and ambitious stops.**

I lived in Ohio in the US amidst a family that did not embrace any faith or confession, for my parents did not affiliate themselves with Christianity or other sects or faiths; they were, if you will, affiliated with a sect that believed in general human values with which my family raised me and taught me a lot of innate ethics.

They were honest and ideal in their marriage and worked with seriousness and responsibility to secure an honorable living for us. Our raising streamed from this spirit of family responsibility that meant that every family member would have a role in life and good demeanor towards others. Perhaps this method of living made us disregard the meaning of religion in our conduct. This is why I did not grow up as Christian or Jewish nor did I embrace any other faith. This phenomenon of irreligiousness is quite familiar in the US, for many Americans live in line with this conduct of general human values. I believe my grandfather was a mulatto; perhaps this is why my parents adopted these principles.

My religious questioning began when I once went with my friends, out of curiosity, to a church. Nevertheless, I then had a series of questions to which I could not find convincing answers from them, especially when I asked about the issues of Christ's sonship, incarnation, and trinity. I could not grasp how an absolute god could incarnate in a limited creature.

### **Tell us about your academic life**

I got my elementary classes in school then moved to high school and university. Just like any youngster, I was perseverant and keen on finishing these stages as a family and social duty to occupy a position in society. When I finished my university studies, the university obliged me to take lessons related to religions and introductions in Theology. That was the first time I came to direct contact with the history of general religions, for prior to that time, a large part of my life was distant from interest in these sciences. Nevertheless, these sciences did not push me to search for their truths, probably due to their utterly theoretical nature.

### **Then what were the factors and circumstances that made you embrace Islam?**

In fact, since childhood, I had always tended to be alone to ponder upon universe phenomena that I could not understand. This sense woke up again in youth time in the form of mature questions; I used to look at things and

conclude that they result from one another. I felt that they had a special harmony and one secret. Their source was completely different, but our ignorance made us view them as though they came from nowhere and had no meaning. Therefore, we neglected scrutinizing them while engaging aimlessly in our absurd lives. Sometimes I wondered what if we were having a big dream and would wake up to find a certain reality after which it would be too late. This is what I found out later in the holy prophetic *Hadiths* that talked about a decisive day in which the creatures stand before a One God who has the conspicuous proof against them.

These anxious questions came in the context of a special situation that I have witnessed in my city. There was a problem between a ranch owner and the Muslim community that wanted to build a mosque in 1982-1983. I knew that the owner was fabricating lies against the Muslims to accuse them of damaging his property. When I was certain of what he had done, I contacted the attorney, testified against the owner, and provided proof. The attorney, then, asked me, *«Are you a Muslim?»* and I said I was not. *«Then what makes you shoulder this responsibility?»* he asked. *«I don't intend to have a problem with him,»* I replied, *«I just want the truth.»* Therefore, the members of the Muslim community got their rights, thanks to the united efforts by some good people.

Later, they invited me to visit them so that they could express their appreciation and gratitude. When I answered their invitation and went into one of their houses, what drew my attention was their strange outfit, which was different from what I used to see, besides their different moral behavior as they hosted me, their willingness to be hospitable, and the way their young respected the old.

I remember that one of them said to me, *«You have done a lot for us, what can we do for you?»* *«I did nothing,»* I replied, *«This is what my conscience told me to do.»* I felt as though words were stumbling in my mouth, but sensed that this was meant to remind me of something; perhaps that was the innate nature within me. I felt as if I have found something linking me to the Muslims' World, as I had been looking for a meaning of this life - a meaning that I was sure was there somewhere. *«I want to know you more,»* I was quick to add. On the following day, they presented me with a book of interpretation of The Holy Quran and a carpet. I read the book passionately and pondered upon its meanings for ten weeks. I referred to some books for research and studies while filled with hope that Allah would guide me to the right path.

I converted to Islam in an Islamic center on a Friday, the day on which Muslims gather for prayers, and I declared the two testimonies (that there is no God but Allah and that Mohammed (p.b.u.h.) is His servant and apostle) before them. I remember that at that time tears poured out of my eyes, and I did not know why. What a gift that was!

### **What was the reaction of your social and family surrounding towards your choosing Islam?**

Following my embrace of Islam, my behavior and morals changed completely, as I decided not to befriend anyone other than the believers and



to stay away from the people of the worldly life and frivolity in line with the Prophet's (p.b.u.h.) recommendation as for choosing one's friends and the way he (p.b.u.h.) mixed with people: *«He who mixes up with some people for forty days will become just like them.»* Therefore, the gap between me and non-Muslims began to widen; the change reached the way I clothed, ate, and spent time: I no longer wore clothes for vainglory, but rather for covering; I economized on food and living costs to get rid of profligacy; as for staying up, I spent it either in worship or reading. This has been sort of purge of what may have been stuck within me of the love of the worldly life and its impermanent pleasures.

At this stage, I lived alone as my parents lived in another state 2000 km away. I would have preferred to tell them directly about my conversion to Islam when I visited them there, but a friend of mine had beaten me and told them. I noticed sullenness on their faces. I quickly said, *«What is the difference between what you raised me to do and the values of this religion? I am now completing these values with piety for the sake of Allah.»* I understood from their answers that they did not accept this sudden change and regarded it as an offence against them. Therefore, the relation between us worsened and was rather cut for several years during which my father died; I attended his funeral. Then my mother passed away without telling me that she had disinherited me. That was a shock to me. My distress, nevertheless, was alleviated by a Muslim friend who reminded me that that had been a trial to me from Allah Who is the real Inheritor of everything.

### **How do you understand calling others unto Islam, and what are the appropriate ways to convince them of its teachings?**

When I wore *hijab* 15 years ago and my connection with Islam's principles and teachings grew stronger, I felt that I was responsible for those who live around me and do not know about the faith. I took the initiative and called many of them. However, I have concluded that the best way to call non-Muslims unto Islam is with wisdom and fair exhortation as the holy verses tell us; that is we should speak to them, have dialogue with them, and explain the religion's rites to them in a way that removes any confusion, obscurity, or vagueness. This can be achieved only through a measured method that uses encouragement, advice, and patience with the wrong from those who do not want to obey the call of innate nature; perhaps this method is what distinguished the Prophets' conduct.

### **What is your opinion in those who say that Islam spread by force not wisdom?**

According to what I found in my studies of religions' history, I believe that Islam has spread in most of the countries it entered through the demeanor of its followers and their good behavior with those countries' peoples, because it is a religion of innate nature and a call that touches the soul. It is my belief that the sword was marginal in most of the conquests, although it was necessary sometimes for defending Muslims against those who debarred (men) from the way of Allah. Thus, force was a mere

defensive method, and Islam's war was a defensive one. It has never occurred that Islam was the party to begin war.

In our call, we never need violence; we rather have to remove the veil that does not allow the truth to get to the people's hearts. We have to open their eyes to see the tolerance and easiness of Islam through good manners and tolerant behavior.

I would like to add something regarding the call of Muslims unto linking to Islam as a method of life and conduct individually and collectively, not as a sectarian identity with which they are born and imitate their parents in formal affiliation. As far as I am concerned, I put myself amongst all Muslims when it comes to the call to learn Islam.

I have already called my son who agreed with many of the ideas but unfortunately did not embrace Islam. However, I succeeded in convincing an American young woman, and she converted to Islam. I also convinced a man, an attorney, who was looking for a way of life that gives life an ethical meaning. I exerted efforts to explain to him the moral principles of Islam and the way it views the afterlife and that the worldly existence is a crossing stop to get there. After two months of dialogue, he embraced Islam along with his daughter, and he told me that that was what he had been looking for.

### **How do you evaluate the situation of Muslims today and their relationship with Islam?**

As for this point specifically, I cannot be lenient and overlook our situation, as Muslims, for I see a long distance between Islam and many of those who associate themselves with it. Perhaps some holy prophetic *Hadiths* warned against this outcome which Muslims have reached. My hope is pinned on those who still adhere to the pure Prophetic path; these people who remind me about Allah every day, the people whom I would not replace with a mountain of gold. I say to my Muslim brethren: be of those who love Allah, His Apostle and his purified Household; remember the graves, for in death there is a reminder for him who has a heart.

### **What is the attribute that you like most in the Apostle of Islam (p.b.u.h.)?**

(Her eyes flashed with tears of longing as she talked) His nobility of character. He has always been a good example for him who looketh unto Allah and the Last Day. He has left for us the greatest gift: The Holy Quran and this faith to change that which is in our hearts.

## Finding My Way....

Lynette Wehner's conversion to Islam

### • How a spiritually dissatisfied American Catholic teacher found fulfillment and direction through her new job at a Muslim school.

My new position at the Islamic school was received with reserved enthusiasm from my Christian family. «*Just make sure you do not convert,*» my father-in-law at the time told me when he found out about it. My mother-in-law was intrigued by the idea of being around something «*exotic*». I grappled with whether I wanted to work at this school. While I would have my own classroom (which I desperately wanted), I would only be part-time, and I would be required to dress Islamically (even cover my hair). This whole concept was very foreign to me. I debated with myself for a day or two until deciding to take my first teaching assignment at this school. I was open and determined that this would be a learning experience for me. Boy, was it ever....

On the first day, the new «*non-Muslim*» teachers were given a «*scarf*» lesson by a sister in the teacher's workroom. We were laughing as we tried different styles. I still remember that morning being pretty relaxed, and it was during this event that I realized I always thought Muslims were stern and serious. It is strange how one can hold certain stereotypes of people without even knowing them. Cross off one misconception...

During my first year of teaching, I learned many things. I was extremely impressed with the way that my students knew my religion (Christianity) better than I did. How did they know the stories? My students were always asking me questions about my beliefs, and they made me think. What DID I believe?

I was brought up Catholic, and as an adult, I started to stray from it. I didn't know what it was that I felt uncomfortable with, but I just knew something wasn't right. I ventured a little into the new-age type of Christianity, but some of that didn't sit right with me either. I just knew that I wanted to connect with God. I didn't want my religion to become something that I felt I had to do in order to be considered a «*good person*» in the eyes of my relatives (as was the case with my husband). I wanted to feel it in my heart. Looking back now, I was lost, but didn't know it at the time.

Kids will be kids, and my Muslim students were no different. They left their books in my classroom instead of taking them home. This was a blessing in disguise as I started to read these books after class. So much of it made sense. To help matters along, one sister and brother were more than happy to answer all of my questions, and I had many! We would discuss Islam and religion for hours. It was very intellectually stimulating, and I was excited about it. I felt that I had found what I was looking for. There was a peace slowly spreading over my heart...

Around this time, I started to read The Qu'ran at home. My husband at the time (I have since divorced him) did not like my interest in Islam. When

I would read The Qu'ran, I would do so in private without his knowledge. At first, I felt that I was doing something blasphemous. I remember being very scared that God would be upset with me. How can any book other than the Bible be from God?? I tried to listen to my heart, and it was telling me to read. Some of the passages of The Qu'ran felt as if they were written just for me. I found myself sitting there and crying many times. All at once, I felt at peace, yet confused. There was something holding me back from accepting it full-heartedly.

After months of reading, talking with people, and a lot of soul searching, there was one event that I consider to be the determining factor in my becoming Muslim. I was standing in my son's room trying to pray. I had a book on Islam opened to the «*how to pray*» section. I was standing there in conflict with myself. I was not used to praying directly to God. All of my life I was taught to pray to Jesus, who would then tell God my prayer (or something like that). I was so scared that I was doing something wrong. I didn't want Jesus mad at me. At that moment, it hit me like a tidal wave. Did I really think that God would be upset at me for wanting to get closer to Him? Did I really believe that Jesus would be upset with me for trying to get closer to God? Isn't that what he wants me to do? God knows my intent. To this day, I believe it was God talking to me - that is how powerful the feeling and voice inside my head was. What did I have to fear?? How could I NOT convert to Islam? At that moment, I started crying and crying. It was what I needed to hear. I knew at that time that I had to convert to Islam. It felt right and nothing else mattered.

After taking my shahada in front of the entire school, I was a new person. I did not have that «*where-do-I-belong-and-what-do-I-believe-in*» feeling anymore. It was gone. I knew that I made the right decision.

I have never been so close to God as I have been since becoming Muslim, *Alhamdulillah*. I am so lucky. Thank you for allowing me to share my experience with you.

## Yusuf Abdullah

(JOSEPH ZAMMIT)

- *Since childhood and throughout my life, Allah, be He exalted, and getting to the Right Faith have been my certain quest and persistent effort.*
- *My long journey of looking for the Divine Truth that led me to Islam and Ahlul-Bait's (A.S.) School passed through in-depth intellectual diving and practical observance of most of the known religions.*

**This is a precious story of conversion and being guided to the Great Islam, enthusiastically and passionately told by the new Maltese educated Muslim, Yusuf Abdullah (formerly Joseph Zammit), who spent his adolescence and many of his years as an adult looking for the faith whose sound doctrine and clear principles satisfied his restless ever-searching mind and the thirst of his soul that yearned for the brilliant Divine lights.**

Since childhood, I was gifted with the sincere love for God, and I was very sensitive to spiritual / religious things. I used to re-tell the stories about the saints to my mother while she was doing the housework. I spent my time reading the life stories of saints and the prophets in Old Testament; as well I was highly fascinated with Jesus (Peace be on him). In my late teens, about 17 years old, this childhood fascination took a drastic turn when a priest gave me a copy of the Plain Truth Magazine. Curiously, I immediately embarked on a correspondence course in Bible study.

Slowly but surely I was becoming aware of something beautiful in the bible which was missing.

I could not accept the teachings of the church anymore as they did not inspire me at all. I couldn't understand how and why our society is so anti-Christian in its values. Religion was for inside the church only! On the other hand, I wanted to seek the inner, true teachings of the prophets and of Jesus (peace on them all) in particular. I started using the Psalms as my daily prayers, and for the first time I got satisfaction and power from prayers so much that tears would flow down my cheeks.

As my thirst and hunger increased, I started studying various mystical paths, as well as psychology. I started reading Tibetan Buddhism, as well as the Sufis who made a very good impression on me, but I brushed them aside as being Muslims. I studied the Hindu mystics, the Upanishads, the *Bhagavad Gita*, then on to the Theosophists, Buddhism, Zen and Tao yoga. During these years, I used to correspond with initiates in these religions in the UK.

Simultaneously, I started studying Gnosticism, and this reverted me back to the Bible studies. I studied a lot of good books by Jewish scholars as well as international Bible scholars about many contradictions in the Bible. Next thing was that I contacted various Rosicrucian Orders and became a member in a couple of them. The Rosicrucians claim to be Gnostic and freemasons, and they promise the initiate to receive Cosmic Power etc. I was still going back, every now and then, to Sufi philosophy and mysticism and still was impressed and attracted by their simplicity and inner love for Allah. The Sufis touched my heart as nothing else did. In 1986, I decided to cut off my name and membership in the Catholic Church. I did this officially through

the legal methods available. This was one of the most challenging things I did, *Alhamdulillah*.

In 1989, I made contact with an Indian Master of high standing and was initiated. This Path is purely mystical and within the folds of the Sikh religion. At last, I said this is it. I was initiated into it for 11 whole years when I started to see similarities in the teachings to Sufi teachings, which I kept interested in. This was very interesting, and I started to investigate the issue further. I found out, to my amazement and satisfaction, that the Path was influenced, way back in the 16th century, by Sufi teachings and mysticism. Interest again flared up within me regarding the Sufis, and so I decided to go back to the roots of it, therefore studying more deeply the Sufi Way, which more and more was influencing me. The great obstacle was that real Sufis were Muslims and worked within the Islamic religion. I found many so called international Sufi orders which were neutral to religion but these I wasn't attracted to. I kept on asking: Why do I have to be Muslim in order to be a Sufi? To become a Muslim is considered as a big 'treason' in Catholic country like Malta. At this period in my life, I increased my prayers fervently and the yearning within me exploded. To my amazement and bewilderment, I found myself reading The Quran, the Holy scripture that is obviously so close to what Jesus taught, as well as the Old Testament Prophets, that I laughed at myself for having missed it (or bypassed it) in my studies.

Reading The Holy Quran was the new pivot in my life. I started exploring the Pillars of Islam and by the help and mercy of Allah I gathered strength enough to embrace Islam on Laylat-ul-Qadr in year 2000. My studies of Sufis became deeper and I made contact with a couple of Tariqas, employing their daily wasifas and dhikr.

### **The Happy Ending**

Here I must emphasize what I regard as the real goal behind my whole life. Since childhood I wanted God and God alone. Whatever Prophet, Guru, and Master I met with, it was only for the glory of God. God was and still is my aim, my life, my breath. Since childhood, I always thought about death. Being rich, having a nice family, being healthy, having a beautiful wife etc... So what? I have to die, then...? Therefore, I was sincere and took life seriously. I used to pray and pray and cry «*Oh Allah! If I succeed in finding You just before I die, my whole life would have been a success!*» Going through life, in all its materialistic attractions and deviations, still my heart pointed towards God.

Having arrived at the stage where I was a candidate student in one of the oldest Sufi Schools, I thought now this is really it. But Allah knows best. This year (2002), one week before embarking for the Hajj, casually I met a Muslim couple from UK at the local *masjid*. I had a very good conversation with them, and in the night they gave me some books to read. I realized they were from the Shia. I was so fascinated by one of the books they gave me which had a direct impact on my being guided to the Shia Muslim faith that made it a point to contact them at the Hotel next morning, but alas! They had flown back home. I went to the Hajj fully convinced and reassured by the knowledge and commitment to the Right Sect, *Ahlul-Bait's* (A.S.)

School. So, I advise anyone to keep himself/herself open to the Truth and recommend their fate to God, be He exalted, for He is the One Who guides and assists. We must have yearning and longing and be sincere in our prayers, then Allah, with His grace and offering, will never let us down or leave us in the abysses of doubt and straying.



## **After a long journey of searching and navigating in the world of thoughts and religions,**

**Indian Nirvan's ship lands safely at the port of Islam**

Another interesting story of a newly-converted Muslim with meaningful signs and indications, rich with human experiences and the flowing faith sentiments is told briefly by the new Muslim Indian brother Nirvan, who has been covered with the lights of the Divine guidance that saved him from the abyss of uncertainty and going astray.

**When and how did it all start? Did it really start or was it simply a spiritual awakening? A realization of the truth which was always innate in me? Allah knows best.**

My name is Nirvan. I was born in a mixed family: My father is Hindu and my mother Muslim. As far as I can switch back to childhood, I remember clearly that I have never received any religious education of any kind. My father was not a religious Hindu, and my mother had relinquished Islam. So I was brought up in a kind of «void», which obviated the need for spirituality. However, I am forever grateful to my parents for having inculcated to me moral values and ethics which will forever guide my life. My family though not religious always nurtured me in a disciplined environment where obedience to parents, speaking the truth, abstaining from stealing, serving mankind... were the cornerstone of our everyday lives.

With hindsight I now recall that in my adolescence, the conundrums of existence flashed upon my mind. What is the purpose of life on earth? Is death the end of everything? Does God exist? Something deep stirred in me, goading my intellect towards a relentless quest for TRUTH. I needed clear, comprehensive, and logical answers to all these questions troubling my existence and puzzling my mind. The adventure, though an intricate maze of theology, ancestral practices, philosophy...had begun.

Starting from atheism (which was quite natural as I had never been introduced to religion), I made my way through Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, but I would not find any spiritual gratification in any of them. I had the inner feeling that TRUTH was out there, maybe right in front of my eyes, but was still eluding me. At a certain point in time, I relinquished further investigation, and desperation swayed me. I drowned myself in Nietzsche, Sartre, Kant, Heidegger, Marx, Freud, Andre Gide, Krishnamurti ... How much more alluring did atheism look in my eyes! Quotes such as «*God is dead*», «*Religion is the opium of the masses*», «*Religion stems from inner fear of the patriarch in primitive societies*». I lived and died with Nietzsche's books and Marilyn Manson's music. I even took to reading «*The Satanic Bible*», and I took interest in Wicca or paganism. This led me to discover Norse mythology, Roman and Greek gods... but my thirst for mysticism and ultimate truth was unabated.

Then the miracle happened! One Friday I decided to accompany my Muslim friend to the *Jummah* prayer just for fun. It was never in my intention to pray there as I was simply curious about Islam's religious practices - the only religion I had not delved into. So we listened to the *Khotba* (speech of the Imam), and I did the namaz postures by imitating my

friend (standing, bowing, prostrating). It was at this point in time that something heavenly, a mystical experience occurred. I did not hear any voice; I did not see any light... I simply felt a supernal emotion like I was being carried away. Every time my forehead touched the ground, it just wouldn't want going back. Allah had sent his guidance to me. I would never be the same again.

After the prayer, my friend asked me how I felt. I said nothing for the human language is too poor to express adequately this emotion. That state of bliss would dwell in my mind for days and was pointing towards a clear cut direction - Islam. So I asked myself, «*Do I engage in research once more?*» Some hidden force was pushing me forward and exhorting me to do so. Soon after, I found myself engrossed in Islamic books and marveling at the 5 pillars of faith, the 6 beliefs, the Quran's scientific miracles and mathematical perfection, the number '19' miracle... With enthusiasm I engaged myself in prayers and earnest study of the Quran. But that was not the end of it.

Several times I lapsed in doubt, and Satan would not let go of me. I spent sleepless nights wondering over whether I was on the right path, whether I was acting in rashness or not? I was even on the verge of apostasy with a willingness to just give up everything. Coupled with some problems I had at home due to my family being non-Muslim, leaving Islam appealed to me. The more so when 75% of new converts leave Islam!! I missed prayers (even the *Jummah*), the Mehraj Shareef, criticized Islam, argued with Muslims about their stupidity, and helped anti-Islam websites. But something in my heart still would not let me let go of Allah. I knew these difficult times were a trial for me. Will I fail or pass? I prayed day and night and begged Allah for help. I felt ashamed for doubting the Word of God and letting myself be influenced by anti-Islamic propaganda. I felt disgust for myself for doubting each time and then imploring Allah for forgiveness. But in the end... light came.

Gradually, Allah strengthened my faith and made me steadfast. I faced criticism and harshness with patience and calmness. Never did I reply back or slander. Whenever I was crestfallen, I would turn to God for guidance and help. I had reverted to the natural religion of mankind - what had I to fear? I knew that the adventure had not come to an end... It has begun! An enthralling journey through the marvels and delicacies of Islam.

I've not reached the end of the road but I'm at peace now with myself and with God.

## Finding the Straight Path

**Sister Zahraa Formerly «Joyce Slaughter»**

American Sister Zahraa formerly (Joyce Slaughter) has seen the Light of Islam in several phases through which she had passed in her former religious life. This light haunted her until the brilliant flash reached her, and she found the Right Path, according to her story which she has sent to the magazine. Zahraa currently works in consolidating and spreading the pillars of Islam in the area where she lives in Michigan State along with her sisters in the American Muslim Sisters Association.

I was born about 3 weeks early on Nov. 29th 1947. To my knowledge, there has never been a Muslim in my family. However, my DNA testing shows that my ancestors did pass through Islamic lands so some of my ancestors undoubtedly were believers in the primordial religion of Adam, Noah and Abraham. I was raised as a Roman Catholic by my parents. My mother had converted before marrying my father. She came from a line of very conservative Protestants many of whom were educated at Moody Bible Institute. There also were some Jewish people in her family, and my mother explained some of the Judaic laws to me.

I have always been very interested in the cultures of others. I find it especially interesting to study the religious beliefs and practices of others. The similarities of so many practices and beliefs have convinced me that there was a primordial belief which has been forgotten and changed through time.

I went to Catholic school until my 2nd year in high school. I had considered becoming religious but decided I did not want so much control in my life. I did not realize at the time how important the guidance of God was in a person's life. I attended Mass faithfully and received the sacraments in due course.

It was at this time I first learned about Islam. I started to study Spanish in high school. As you know the Iberian Peninsula was greatly influenced by the Islamic culture.

Sadly to say, by the time I started college I quit practicing my faith. It was not that I disbelieved, I just shoved God to the furthest corner of my mind. Even through many struggles in my first marriage, I was not going to church. I said private prayers, and I read about many different faiths. I divorced and eventually remarried and went through some times of severe anxiety. Finally, I started going back to church and had a «*born again*» experience. This is a special closeness to God. It brought great peace to me and reduced my anxiety. From that time on I attended church regularly.

Allah, however, had plans to draw me closer to Him or so it seemed to me when I look back. My daughter became friends with an Iranian girl in her school. I met her parents and came to know some of their culture. It was then I bought my first translation of The Holy Koran. We moved away after a year or so and for four years continued to go to church. Then after another move, I met a dear friend who is married to an Iranian man. Again I learned more of the culture and how to cook some of the food. Even though she was not a Muslim, she taught me about Islam and again my interest was captured. I continued with church attendance and Bible Studies. She moved

away but our friendship still endures. I moved again, this time to Minnesota. I found a church, started volunteering and was happy in my beautiful home. In 1997, I started having the feeling God had something He wanted me to do, something specific beyond just obeying the laws of the church and the laws of our country. I felt I had to start to learn to drive places on my own so I drove to Omaha NE to work for a week. I went to confession at Christmas time and told my priest about my feeling that I had a special mission. I think he thought I was «*strange*». Then in January 1998, my husband died of a heart attack. He was only 46. I became very close to God then, and it gave me a great deal of comfort.

I spent a great deal of time searching out what I should do with myself at that time. I became very active in my church, helping with fundraising for a school and being elected to the parish council. Through my church, I met people from all over the world. I was able to visit India and Spain. In India, I saw people of all religions living together in harmony.

In May of 2001, I finally decided to follow a call of God and begin saying the Catholic rosary. I focused on praying for Peace in the world. For many years, I felt a strong urge to work for Peace in the world. It seemed a hopeless task.

For the next few years, I continued on with my life. I read about other religions and continued with my volunteer activities. In 2003, I started to attend a series of lectures about Islam at the mosque in Bloomington. After the series was over, I started to attend a session at one of the sister's houses but then I moved and was traveling so I stopped. I think I knew that I would become a Muslim but I just did not want to give up and change. I did buy a copy of The Holy Koran translated by Yusuf Ali, and I read it from cover to cover. I read biographies of Mohammad and books about Islam. When my dog died, I did not get another dog but got a cat instead as I knew most Muslims thought dogs were unclean.

By now it was 2006, and I received more and more signs from Allah. One time a friend and I were talking about the troubles in the Islamic world. She said we Non-Muslims could not be the ones to bring peace to the Islamic world. We agreed it had to come about through the Muslims themselves. I knew that if I wanted to work for peace in the world I would have to become a Muslim. My carnal self did not want to change. I ignored further messages from Allah delivered by people in my Bible study group. One lady kept telling all of us to submit to God's will. Isn't that what Islam is all about? Another one said: Choose a path and stick to it. Is not Islam the Straight Path? I had tried for years to get something to tie me closer to the Catholic Church. I applied for quite a few jobs at my parish but was not found suitable. I know that Allah blocked my being hired so that I would be free to join Islam. Still I fought God's will. I never thought I was stubborn but I am. I did not want to give up alcohol, pork, or practice the discipline of daily prayers. I had many scarves and long skirts but I did not want to be compelled to cover my hair.

Finally, when I was attending college classes I decided to give up alcohol. When I was able to do that I knew I could do everything else. Even so I still feared to take the step. Finally, I prayed to Allah to send me a

teacher if He wanted me to become a Muslim. Since I was studying at a Catholic University I was sure no teacher would appear. However, in Sura 36:82 Allah says «*Be and it is*». He sent a Muslim scholar to my class in Christian Theology. At that time, I knew there could be no more hesitation. I made my *Shahadeh* shortly afterwards. I know I will have to continue on in my struggle to be a good Muslim but I know with the help of Allah and my brother and sister Muslims I will keep on the straight path.

## The French Guided Brother (Cerel)

**The French young man who has been guided to Islam; Cerel says:**

● «*My heart was relieved by the Word of Right that was conspicuous in Islam and embodied in the course of Ahlul-Bait (a.s.)*».

Cerel Sevrak is a young man who has had a faithful heart for Allah since childhood; therefore, Allah, be He exalted, honored him with the blessing of Islam; by His mercy, he has become a Muslim man who is proud of his new affiliation in spite of the criticism he got from many for being a Frenchman who embraced Islam.

However, Cerel's heart is reassured with faith, enlightened by the Word of Right that was conspicuous in the Faith of Mohammed (p.b.u.h.) and embodied in the course of *Ahlul-Bait* (a.s.). Through *Noor al-Islam Magazine*, he tells us the story of that change within himself towards Islam which he describes as the pure love for Allah.

I was born in 1975 in a family whose members did not believe in Allah, be He exalted. When I received my first communion, which represented my entrance into Christianity, I did not get from them any opposition or encouragement. I was young when I joined the religious education classes; I was very enthusiastic and happy with the teachings I received, especially when they were relevant to Christ (a.s.); it was somewhat superficial information, but enough to nourish the dreams of a little 12-year-old priest. I started reading the Old and New Testaments with relief. As I was advancing in reading them, I noticed a huge gap between the Holy Books' teachings and the ecclesiastic lessons. I began to ask myself a lot of questions, such as the prohibition of a priest from getting married, although marriage is a blessed step that religion encourages, and the spread of icons and statues as religious symbols even in churches, although this does not agree with what is stated in the Holy Book. The too many questions and paradoxes made me adhere to my faith while neglecting the church teachings. Thus, my relation was directly with Allah; it did not go through a church, nor was it determined by a religious authority. I have remained loyal to this line which I had drawn when I was 15 years old.

I remember that when I was introduced to friends from Jehovah Witnesses my argument with them was based on my belief in the Bible, while their questions urged me to search in order to figure out the answers. However, what I have learnt from my opponent is that reason is the way to know Allah; and this is still the method I use in my religious life. Furthermore, I greatly respected and admired the link I sensed the brothers had among each other.

During my college years (I chose to study Psychology) I met a friend who soon became like a brother to me. Besides living in the dormitory, we also used to stay together at night exchanging points of view or having philosophical chats that had no limits. My friend was a Muslim who fasted the Month of *Ramadan* but nothing more. His internal faith resembled the convictions I had developed about my God. As I lacked the information about his religion (Islam), he once presented me with The Quran; he also taught me how to perform wudu'u as he explained that it was necessary to have wudu'u when I wanted to read The Quran. The Book remained on my

desk for months, and I did not open it. I felt that I was not fit for opening it. Then my friend suddenly disappeared. Another coincidence had me meet a Moroccan woman who invited me to attend religious sessions in the Month of *Ramadan*. As the discussion was clearly about Islam, I began to ask my questions and know more and more about the Islamic faith. I still remember that the first time I heard about International Zionism I was more than 27 years old.

The journey for truth has begun. I dived into this vast knowledge to find the answers that would heal my questions. I would just drown myself in research and thinking one night after the other. As questions grew more and more within me, I would extinguish them with knowledge and research. My certainty that there is a religion that can answer all my questions, aspirations, and thoughts was being affirmed day after day.

I knew that Islam was the last of the Divine Religions, and that Allah was the Only Lord of all these religions. I believed in this and started to see Islam as the concluding faith to those faiths. I had the courage to open The Quran. The minute I started reading the verses, I was deeply attracted to it; the more I read, the more attracted I became and wished to get to the last pages. I understood that a Muslim believes in the existence of the Christ (a.s.) as an honorable messenger. This fact about Jesus (a.s.) was identical to the image I had drawn within me about him, the way I believed in him innately. It just became clearer. I believed that Mohammed (p.b.u.h.) was the final messenger. I saw myself as a spontaneous natural Muslim, so how do I worship? I started to be friendly to one of my neighbors who was an Alawite Syrian. We had a lot of discussions, and when things were too difficult for him to answer, he would call his teacher in Syria. He talked to me a lot about Imam Ali (a.s.), a personality that naturally attracted me; nevertheless, my neighbor's exaggerations were too obvious to me.

### **The Method of Ahlul-Bait**

I continued my search and went deeper. To me, the method of *Ahlul-Bait* (a.s.) was the natural luminous one; for the treason of Judas in Christianity was an event that repeated itself after the death of the Prophet (p.b.u.h.) and the turn made by some of the companions. The Holy Quran warns us in several verses against such treasons. Some of the followers of Prophet Mohammed (p.b.u.h.), who was hurt in his lifetime more than any other prophet, were not merciful toward him after his death, for the current swept away many Muslims, and only a few adhered to his commandments. Here, for instance, reason guides us to the straight path, that of Mohammed's Household; although those who faithfully followed that path and sacrificed for it were and still are quite a few.

### **Conclusion**

My reversion to Islam has had a great impact on those around me: my friends and especially my university colleagues. One of them (who later became my brother-in-law) used to come and talk to me about Islam. We prayed together, and he would correct me if I had learned something wrong besides explaining rulings to me. I followed the Jaafari School. We held in my room sessions of dialogue and philosophical discussions that were



attended by many young men and women. There was my chance to meet my wife who has been to me a Divine blessing that illuminates my path, for, thanks to her, I have learned to memorize some Quran Surahs and to perform prayers in Arabic.

Suddenly, my friend and brother who had disappeared and I missed for a long time showed up again, but this time he has changed: he has become religiously committed. He took me to the mosque for the first time and explained to me the Jamaa Prayer rulings. He got married as well, and each of us has had a daughter, and our families grow up in the light of Islam.

My God and Lord, to You I pray whenever I need anything and tell Him my secrets privately wherever I wish. Praised You are for creating me, raising me and giving me what I have. I praise You an endless praise. O God Fill my heart with Love for You, Fear of You, Belief in You and Faith in You.

## Conversion to the Right Faith:

### The Story of Argentinean Young Man Mohammed Essa Garcia

One of the results of the good reputation that Argentinean Muslims enjoy is the phenomenon of the conversion to Islam by many Argentinean citizens due to the noble values they have seen in the Islamic faith and the sound ethical nature of the Muslim immigrants' behavior. Within this framework, we have received from writer brother Mujahed Shararah, who lives in Argentina, the interesting story of Mohammed Essa Garcia, an Argentinean young man who has 'found happiness in Islam', as he says, following a long pursuit of the truth in which he followed the lead of the Holy Prophet's great companion Salman al-Farisi.

Mohammed Essa was born to Christian parents. He went to church when he was a child. When he became ten years old, his innocent soul initiated him in a new journey of meditation on the universe around him. In spite of his young age and his mind's inability to reach conclusions, his innate nature would not accept the Trinity creed, for he believed, with his innocence, that Jesus the son of Mary (A.S.) was a great personality, not a god. This issue launched discussions and questions between him and his family at home and the priests of the church he went to. The innocent child Mohammed Essa Garcia could not find answers that would ease his recurring early questions and the issues raging within himself. However, he got more confused and anxious after his family and church did not mind his question due to his young age.

Years passed, and Mohammed became fifteen years old, but he still had within himself the same questions. He went to high school where he got superficial and, most of the time, untrue statements about Islam; for his textbook said Muslims worshipped the Black Stone and prostrated for the *Kaaba*. These statements were accompanied with photos of Muslims praying, prostrating, and circumambulating the *Kaaba*.

Mohammed Essa grew up, and so did his perplexity; he was now a young man who could analyze and conclude as his adherence and passion to look for the truth grew stronger. One night in October 1989, he was upset because the question went on resounding within him: Who created the Universe? He stood in the night darkness, looked at the sky and called, «*You, who have created me, show me the Right Path, or I will end my life for I'm leading a stray life.*» His eyes wept tears of perplexity before he went to sleep. In the morning, he woke up to a knock on the door. When he opened the door, he found a man with a bright face requesting his permission to talk to him. He said, «*I am Mashurka, a Muslim man who came to talk to you about Islam.*» He started telling him about Allah, His Oneness and Greatness, how He deserved to be worshipped, and how He is far from any flaw.

Mohammed Essa's heart was relieved upon hearing these words. He looked at the sky recalling the prayer he had made the night before, and felt Allah's mercy engulfing him and waves of faith push one another in his heart. Mashurka's conversation with him went on for three hours, after which he took leave to go to the Friday prayer. Before he left, Mohammed requested that he accompanies him to the mosque: he has found his long-

sought goal and would not let it slip through his fingers. He listened to the *Khotba* (sermon) that was about Islam. When the prayer was over, he said to Mashurka, «*I want to become a Muslim. What do I have to do?*» «*You have to utter the two testimonies,*» Mashurka told him, «*and then perform the major ritual ablution.*» He did what he was told to do, and the worshippers cried «*Allahu Akbar*» in joy over his conversion to Islam.

### **The family's thorny road and the immigration for the truth**

Mohammed Essa Garcia had learned at school and at home to be free to believe whatever he wanted; this has never had any impact on the family life. However, after his conversion, things were not the same, for he encountered difficulties from all sides, as his mother got very angry with him. She threatened him, in spite of her great love for him. His father expelled him from the house while he was an 18-year-old student. He left the house sadly but also shocked by his parents who had always bragged about freedom of belief and conduct.

Mohammed Essa Garcia had no one to resort to other than Mashurka who was there for him and provided him with a simple job in a plastic manufacturing company and a shelter in his house where he could stay. Mohammed Essa worked and went to the mosque to learn Arabic and the teachings of Islam. All he cared about was to get more knowledgeable and familiar with the Islam Prophet's (p.b.u.h.) method.

He wanted to learn about the Prophet's (p.b.u.h.) *sira* (biography); therefore, he read the book compiled by Martin Lynx. The more he read about the persecution the Prophet (p.b.u.h.) was subjected to and the patience he showed while encountering this, the more determined he became to confront the tough conditions he faced. Mohammed then exerted efforts to memorize The Holy Quran and the Prophet's (p.b.u.h.) *Hadith*. He memorized the *Amma Part* and the *Arbaoun A-Nawawiah*.

Mohammed yearned to visit the Al-Bait Al-Haram (The Holy House) and stand before the Apostle's Shrine until the Hajj time in 1993 when he went there and prayed in front of *al-Kaaba* declaring that he does not prostrate for it, nor does he worship the Black Stone, for he worshipped and prostrated for Allah alone.

After Hajj, Mohammed Essa was determined to major in *Hadith* science after he had learned Arabic. He always had that wish that Allah, be He exalted, guided his mother to Islam. Thus, he wrote her letters and called her from time to time. One time she surprised him by saying, «*I have become a Muslim, Mohammed.*» He rejoiced at the news of her conversion. Mohammed Essa returned to Argentina in 2004 after an eleven-year - journey in which he memorized ten parts of The Holy Quran and mastered the Arabic language. Then, Mohammed Essa carried the flag of call unto Allah and telling people about Him and about Islam. He encountered tough conditions; however, from the claws of darkness light is born: many Argentineans started to ask him about Islam, and he explained to them the truth about the false accusations that were fastened on this Right Religion. Seventy men and women embraced Islam, thanks to him, and dedicated a

site for prayer in their neighborhood. Mohammed Essa currently teaches the new Muslims Arabic, Quran reading and Islam teachings.

The call unto Islam became Mohammed Essa's foremost activity; his Tableegh (call) methods developed, for as he mastered Arabic and Spanish, he embarked on translation since he had noticed the scarcity of Islamic books in Spanish; thus, he worked as manager of the Spanish language department in the International Islamic Book Publishing House. Up to now, he has translated over seventy Islamic books from Arabic to Spanish.

Mohammed Essa pleads with everyone, governments and institutions, to support Dawa and Tableegh in Argentina and Latin America. He hopes the translation activity will increase to include all Islamic religious books. It is not strange to hear the Argentinean Muslim Mohammed Essa blaming Muslims for failure to introduce Islam as it ought to be introduced in Latin America, for he has already seen the greatness of Islam and its usefulness in achieving happiness for man nowadays. He believes Muslims underestimate Islam. *«There are many Du'at who travel to other places in the world, whereas quite a few come to us to call unto Allah,»* he said, *«and this saddens me a great deal, for people in Argentina accept Islam, but they need those who can guide them to it.»*

### **A call to Muslims**

In the end of our interview with him, he said, *«Sixty percent of the Argentineans who have embraced Islam learned about Islam from the internet. There are, furthermore, Spanish sites about Islam and Spanish-language chat forums. Therefore, I plead with the Arab Muslim youth to learn Spanish and surf these sites in order to call unto Allah.»*

*«Please, take interest in the affairs of the new Muslims in Latin America, and we welcome you all and would like to receive you in our homes,»* he concluded.

## Russian Former Priest Ali Viacheslav Polosin

### Talks about his Conversion to Islam

**Who is the Russian priest who converted to Islam? What is the story of the man who came to see him in the church and whose words were an invitation to guidance? And what are Polosin and his companions doing to support Islam in Russia?**

*«I was raised by a family of unbelievers, but I realized the existence of Allah, Whom I beseech at every bad moment,»* said Ali Viacheslav Polosin, a professor in philosophy and political sciences.

Polosin, who wrote several books about life sciences, the latest of which being *Myths, Religion, and the State* that was published in Moscow in 1999, said he joined the Philosophy Faculty in Moscow University in a drive to know the truth about Allah Almighty. He graduated after he had thoroughly studied Orthodox Christianity in which he said he had found many contradictions.

During the Soviet Union era, where Communism was the major ideology and the Orthodox Church was the sole alternative, Polosin joined the monks' schools and became a priest in 1983.

He admitted that his being a monk had represented a symbol of the struggle against atheism, and, at the same time, being a monk meant practicing rituals with the aim of meeting the believers' needs. He said he did not fully believe in those religious rituals. A sense of duality between personal faith and the religious-social duty crawled into him. Polosin believes his doubts and stances, which he could not conceal, were behind his deportation to Central Asia to serve in a church in Tajikistan *«where I directly met for the first time with Muslims and Islam to which I felt attracted.»*

He said a Muslim sheikh came to the church one day and asked him several questions, *«After that he told me, 'You are seeing things through the eyes of a Muslim, and, Allah willing, you will be a Muslim.'»*

*«The whole thing was bizarre; the sheikh entered the church repeatedly, careless of what might happen to him, to call the church keeper for Islam. The strange thing was that this call entered my soul with no resistance.»* He said, *«I did not see the sheikh after that,»* and then he realized he was a caller to Islam.

Following these events, Polosin took care of a deserted church in Kaluga area. Thanks to the intimate relations between Polosin and church-goers, he was elected as a parliament member in 1990 and chaired a committee for the freedom of belief. He was fully devoted to his parliamentary work after the church liberated him from his religious duties.

His parliamentary work was crowned when the house passed a law granting Muslims many facilities in Russia. The law was effective until 1997.

Polosin acknowledges that in the early 1990s he devoted himself energetically to studying the old historic origins of Christianity in a bid to find answers to the doubts that kept haunting him; this in-depth study, nevertheless, increased and deepened his doubts.

The year 1995 was that of shift in his religious convictions as he stopped practicing his church rituals and started to study Islam.

*«However, reading the Russian translation by Agnani Krachovsky of The Holy Quran tarnished its holy meanings, but after reading the modern translation of Quran and Islamic books about Christ everything was clear. I was also attending lectures about Islam and had therefore no doubts in converting to Islam,» he said.*

*«No one knew about my conversion to Islam but two persons. This decision threatened my life and that of my wife who converted to Islam before me ... She announced the shahadatain (declaring that there is only One God and Mohammed is His prophet), and I announced it for al-Muslimoon (Muslims) newspaper. I changed my name to Ali and my wife's to Alia.»*

In response to the western theories which argue that conflict among religions and civilizations is inevitable, Polosin pointed out that he believed Russia presented an exemplar of peaceful coexistence between Islam and Christianity in spite of some historic eras in which the Russian state harmed Muslims as was the case during the reign of Ivan the Terrible and others.

Polosin warned that there were foreign forces that sought to instigate religious feuds in Russia in order to undermine the country's national unity and weaken the Russian State. He accused Zionism of aborting good relations between Muslims and Christians in Russia.

He rejected the idea of linking Islam and terrorism.

*«How do they talk about Islamic fundamentalism and we all know that Jewish fundamentalism, being within the ideological framework of Zionism, created a state based on myths at the expense of another people?» inquired Polosin.*

As for what he is doing to support Islam in Russia, Polosin said, *«The urgent task in this regard is to present the true image of Islam to the Russian citizens at all levels, including the state's security, social, political and economic bodies.*

*«We are spreading the bright image of Islam, as a faith based on love and peaceful coexistence, among Russian intellectuals. We have begun publishing «The Upright Path» which includes articles presenting a modern view of Islam in Russia besides the Muslims' attitudes on the dilemmas and problems that the Russian society is facing.»*

The former priest, a current advisor to the president of the Religious Administration for Muslims in European Russia, said he *«is currently working, along with a group of Russian Muslims on a social program for Russian Muslims.»*

## Spanish Brother

**Yusuf Fernandez** says:

●*I understood that Islam was what I had been waiting for a long time. Islam appeared to be in my eyes a strong and clear way of life (not only a religion) without inexplicable mysteries.*

●*Before Islam, I was a nervous person who did not see the sense of my existence and had a pessimistic view on life and the future. Now, I am a quiet, active, and positive person.*

●*In Spain, the Dawah perspectives are good although the work in this field is clearly insufficient.*

**Yusuf Fernandez, another western Muslim brother, narrates the interesting story of his conversion to the beautiful lights of Islam following a long journey along the doctrines and ideologies prevalent in the western world that did not convince or reassure him as for their soundness or goodness. He has been generous enough to write the story of his embracing Islam to tell the magazine readers and all those who are certain about the greatness of this Right Religion.**

I was born in 1965 in Asturias, a region in northern Spain, which was claimed to be the cradle of the National-Catholicism, the political and religious doctrine which dominated Spain for five centuries. According to the myths of the old official thought, Muslims, who had come to Spain in A.D. 711 through the Gibraltar Strait and taken over most of the Iberian Peninsula in only seven years, were defeated by the King Pelayo and some few Christian followers in Covadonga, a mountainous stronghold in Asturias. This was said to be the beginning of the Reconquista (the eight-century Christian holy war to conquer the whole Peninsula and eliminate the Muslim states in it). On January 2, 1492, Granada fell, and this date meant the end of the bright Muslim period of Al Andalus.

After that, Spain was an official Catholic state until the death of the dictator Francisco Franco in 1975. In 1978, the first democratic Constitution was passed, and the first law of religious freedom was also passed two years later.

Due to these historical facts, Asturias was supposed to be a difficult place for people to discover Islam. The Austrian and Spanish identities have been linked to the National-Catholicism for a long time. However, this fact does not mean that the Catholic religion is currently strong in Asturias. The alliance of the Catholic Church with Franco's military rebellion against the Second Republic with his 40-year - dictatorship has seriously undermined the Church's credibility. The spreading of Socialism and Communism in Asturias and Spain was another key factor explaining the rapid process of secularism of the Spanish society. Currently, only 20% of Spaniards are practicing Catholics, and more than one million practice other religions.

My family was a traditional Catholic one. One uncle (my father's brother) is a priest. I was educated in this faith from the first years of my life. However, the environment in which I grew up (friends, school and so on) was highly secularized.

When I was in my early teens, I started to give up Catholic practices, which I considered an increasingly unbearable burden. I quit going to



church on Sundays, and my lifestyle became more secularized. I also became member of the Communist Party and Youth.

### **Discovering Islam**

In the Communist Party, I worked in the international relations field. I started to take part in solidarity campaigns with the Palestinian people. In 1984, I became member of the Association of Friends of the Palestinian People, which was based in Gijon. I began to read more about the history of the Palestinian resistance against the Zionist oppression and became more interested in this issue, especially because I hated to see how the international community allowed the Zionists to carry out their criminal activities without doing anything.

My first contacts with the Arab and Muslim worlds were also my first contacts with Islam. In 1979, when I was 14 years old, I watched on TV the fall of the Shah's regime and the creation of the Islamic Republic in Iran under the slogan «*No East No West*». I admired Iran as a country that did not bow to Western pressure or threats like many other nations in the world. Through the Association of Friendship with Palestine, I was able to get some books on Islamic issues, and I wrote to the embassies of Islamic countries demanding more information. The Embassy of the Islamic Republic of Iran was one of the few ones which answered me. A Spanish Muslim who worked there sent me some books and information about an Islamic association which was mainly made up by Spanish converts.

By reading those books, I understood that Islam was what I had been waiting for a long time. Islam appeared to be in my eyes a strong and clear way of life (not only a religion) without inexplicable mysteries. It was an easy way to reach God, whom I had never been able to communicate with during my period as Catholic.

I phoned my new Muslim friends, and they invited me to visit them in Madrid. I spent some days with them, and I discovered a new way of life with different - and far more attractive - values: generosity, a healthy and happy life, patience, steadfastness, and hospitality. On the second day, my decision was already made: Islam had taken over my heart. On 21 June 1989, two weeks after the death of Imam Khomeini - a figure whose example and thought had inspired me - I made the Shahada in a cafeteria with two Spanish brothers and an exiled Iraqi.

From the beginning, I knew that I would face some difficulties. For example, my links with my friends started to deteriorate because of their way of life, especially drinking alcohol as a way of socializing, was unacceptable for me. Moreover, my conversion to Islam made me a new and weirder person for them. Some of them even thought I had joined a damaging cult.

My family respected my decision especially because they saw many wonderful changes in my new life. I did not drink alcohol, and my behavior and attitude were very positive. Some of my relatives, however, did not like seeing my photo or articles in the newspapers about my life as Muslim and the Islamic associations in which I carried out my activities. Currently, I am secretary of the Muslim Federation of Spain (the second Muslim Federation in the country).

Islam has changed my life for good. Before, I was a nervous person who did not see the sense of my existence and had a pessimistic view on life and the future. Now, I am a quiet, active, and positive person who holds an optimistic view of our life, which is only a small and short piece of existence and the gate to the eternal life that God (Allah) has promised us. Islam has helped increase my happiness in good times and has protected and relieved me as an unshakeable shield in difficult times.

Islam has also taught me a sense of the value of things. Sometimes, when I see people becoming outraged by unimportant petty things, I see clearly that their life is empty and that they have not found the sense of their existence. They keep themselves apart from the true happiness.

### **Islamic Dawa**

About Islamic Dawa, I think that Muslims must use new modern technologies, especially internet, to reach out the general population. Many young people nowadays use the internet as their main source of information. There have to be sites in different languages with attractive contents and clear explanations. Up to now, people who become Muslims in the West need to go through a long and difficult process to get accurate information on Islamic issues. Most of them only find negative and false things, which the enemies of Islam continue to spread.

In 2003, my Islamic Association held the first conference of Spanish-speaking Muslims, which many Muslims from countries such as Mexico, Chile, Brazil, Argentine, Colombia, and Panama attended.

The Dawah work in Latin America is much easier than in Europe due to the openness and character of the peoples of these countries, whose importance is always increasing. In this sense, I propose that Islamic sites in Spanish language be supported and more Dawah workers be sent to this continent.

In Spain, the Dawah perspectives are good although the work in this field is clearly insufficient. Unfortunately, some Muslims still stick to the wrong approach of «*only-Mosques*» and are ready to give funds to build mosques, but they do not support other tools that are even more important to reach out the non-Muslim population (media, cultural centers etc). Up to now, there is not a Muslim - written - newspaper in Spain.

## Canadian Brother

### Greg Sowden (Ali Mahdi)

- *My journey to Islam has not always been easy.*
- *I am so thankful to God that I have found the true path.*

My name is Greg Sowden. I converted to Islam from the Roman Catholic Church on December 15, 2001 (*Ramadan* 29, 1422), when I was 16 years old. I have chosen the Muslim name «*Ali Mahdi*.» I'm 24 years old (born in 1985). I was a history major at Wilfred Laurier University in Waterloo, Ontario, Canada and I hope to study at *hawzah* (seminary) in Iran in the near future. My home-town is Port Dover, Ontario, Canada and I grew up on a 400-acre poultry/beef-cattle farm. I was raised as a practicing Roman Catholic. Before I became Muslim, I went to church every week and never questioned my beliefs. I would consider myself a devote Catholic when I was growing up. Whenever I heard someone say something wrong about Catholicism, I would try to prove them wrong, although I now realize my knowledge was rather limited.

My mum is concerned that I am not following the «*right religion*» anymore. From her comments, I think she misses me going to church with the rest of our family, which I completely understand. She keeps telling me I was happy with my religion before, so, she wonders, why did I change? I wasn't looking into converting to Islam when I began researching it; I read Islam out of pure interest. Learning about other people's religions and cultures has interested me since I was young. My paternal grandma's large National Geographic magazine collection contained magazines going back to the 1930s, and numerous issues dealt with Islam, which fascinated me. I also began to read atlases which got me interested in geography and current events. Living in a small town, I didn't know anyone from a non-Christian background, which made me curious about the outside world.

In 2000, I began to look for people from different countries to talk to online because of my fascination with learning about other people. On a pen pal website, I met Yahya, a Shi'ah teenager from Kuwait. I began to ask him questions about his religion because I didn't know a great deal about it. I never thought about converting to Islam because I thought I was happy being Catholic. When I started taking a course at high school called «*World Religions*,» my interest was intensified. In my textbook, it had some information about the position of Jesus in Islam as seen through The Quran. I knew Jesus was a prophet in Islam, but not how important he was. Nor did I know how his mother, Mary, was considered one of the four greatest women in Islam! After school, I went home and researched the role of Jesus in Islam on the internet. I also found a few books in my school library on Islam in general. The role of Jesus in Islam was the proof I had that the Christian view of Jesus' divinity could not be correct. The Islamic belief opened my mind to things that I had never thought about regarding Christianity and Jesus in general. The more I learnt about Jesus and Islamic beliefs the more I wanted to convert. The information I read convinced me that Islam was the truth. The arguments were good, and there was even proof of Muhammad and Islam in the Bible!

As I learnt more and became engrossed in studying Islam, I emailed my Kuwaiti friend and told him about my findings. I told him that «*maybe I should convert after learning some more about Islam.*» I didn't plan on doing it soon because it was not easy to follow Islam without a community around me. I thought I would convert when I would go to university because I couldn't get to a mosque. I told my Kuwaiti friend this, and he said I could say the *Shahadeh* to him. So on December 15, 2001 (*Ramadan* 29, 1422) I said the *shahadah* («*there is no god but Allah, and Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah*») to him over MSN Messenger. By saying those wonderful words I became a Muslim! *Alhamdulillah!* All praise belongs to God!

Converting to Islam caused me many problems with my family, especially with my mum, who has been the most vocally against my conversion. When I told my mum that I had become a Muslim, she became very upset. Her anger lasted until about 2004, but since then she has accepted it, although she is not happy with my choice. When I received some books, including The Quran, in the mail after my conversion, I was forced to hide them from her. My mum was also very upset when she saw me prostrate (*sajdah*) as it was a very visible sign that I was no longer Catholic. Much of my extended family has not commented negatively on my conversion, although my late maternal grandfather, who was known for being opinionated, did not like it and he made it known. My very religious maternal grandmother, whose brother is a retired priest in England, has not been relatively accepting. I never lost friends because I've never had many friends in the first place. I've never gotten along with most people my age, and I've long felt that I don't fit in. I'm also very shy. It is unfortunate that my family does not know what Islam is, and I don't blame them with all the misinformation they hear on the news. I have tried to explain my beliefs to them but they don't care to learn and refuse to read any books. Before I left for university, my mum made me go to church every week. I continued to go to church until October 2003, which coincided with the Holy Month of *Ramadan*. It was hard to avoid taking communion because of my mum's pressure but since I was fasting I slipped the host (Eucharistic bread) in my pocket, but my mum caught me, and I never went to church again, except for my grandpa's funeral.

I have had the pleasure of finding a wonderful Muslim community in Kitchener-Waterloo, and the community has opened their arms to me. On Wednesday, September 10, 2003, I went to the mosque for the first time, which was an eye-opening experience, as it was so different from a church service. I went with Brother Hasnein (whom I met through the Shia Chat forums). He and I attended the university in Waterloo, Ontario. He attended to University of Waterloo, and I attended to Wilfred Laurier University, which are about a 15-minute walk apart. The event we celebrated was the birthday of Imam 'Ali Ibn Abi Taleb', the beloved cousin and son-in-law of the Holy Prophet Muhammad. We took the bus there, and we kind of got lost walking down the street because the mosque was in the middle of a residential area. Then we saw a woman in *hijab* going into the mosque, and so we went in. We got there late but we caught most of the lecture by

Sheikh Shafiq Huda. After that, we did Maghreb and Isha prayers. That was the first time I have prayed with other Muslims, and it was a wonderful experience. After that Hasnein introduced me to a few brothers, and we talked for a few minutes, and we had a nice treat of ice cream and chocolate bars. Then it was time to back to university. Sheikh Saleem Bhimji drove me and Hasnein home and showed us the Halal restaurants and Muslim places in town. I have become an active member of the community, and I am currently serving as secretary of the Islamic Humanitarian Service, a charity based in Kitchener. I thank God that the Kitchener-Waterloo Shi'ah Muslim community has accepted me as a member of their community and has done so much to help me.

My journey to Islam has not always been easy, and I have had to struggle and make a lot of sacrifices along the way. I have often failed to live up to my duties to God but I am so thankful to Him that I have found the true path - Shi'ah Islam. I know that submitting to God through the example and traditions of the Holy Family of the Prophet Muhammad is the purpose of life.

## How I found the Right Path

Kathy (Ma'asumeh) Kooshesh

### •How does one look back on the most important event in her life and put it into perspective?

This event for me was my discovery of the “right path”, Islam, and Submission to the One God. This event, my acknowledging the power of Islam, and my conscious decision to submit to Allah (SWT) was this most life-changing event.

But looking back on it, I wonder how did I get to where I am today, a Muslim? Surely, coming from a rural Arkansas background and never even hearing about Islam until my late teens, would not prepare me for this huge change. What, I wondered, made me different from all the others who hear about Islam and reject it or who don't realize that it is the truth? Well, I usually start long before I even knew the word Islam to explain how I ended up here.

When I was a small child, my mother was very ill. She was born with a heart condition and had her first stroke by the time I was three years old. My mother's health problems always made me aware of the fragility of life, and what a great gift it is. My parents divorced when I was seven, leaving me with my mother. The few years we spent together after that, I believe, helped shape and mold me to become the person I am today.

My mother was not a Muslim, but she was a sincere Christian. She believed whole-heartedly that our purpose in life is to serve God. Although we were not regular church-goers, faith was an important part of our lives. We depended on each other and grew together during those few years. My mother eventually had another stroke, which left her totally disabled, and forced me to move in with my father and step-mother. At the time, it was a blow to me, as I didn't want the change. I love my father dearly, however, and looking back, welcome the time that I spent growing up in his household.

My father is not a religious person, but he is spiritual. He was always fair and moral, and between my mother's faith and my father's morality, I grew up with a strong sense of responsibility toward God. I did not always attend church or participate in organized religious activity, but I did feel at peace with God, especially in the quiet walks I used to take in the woods near our house. I could see the Power and Majesty of Allah all around me in the animals, the trees, and the beauty of His creation. I never doubted that Allah was real and powerful, but I did not know how to express my faith. So I began to look into church.

I attended various denominations from the Church of Christ to the Assembly of God, to the General Baptist. The General Baptist Church is where I spent the most time and made many friends.

I think that making friends was the main reason that I stuck with attending church, though. I remember having many questions that could not be answered (like the concept of the trinity). I just figured my faith was not strong enough, or I was not smart enough to understand. Nobody could explain it to me adequately. Eventually, I just pushed the confusion behind

me and decided it was something that I would understand if God willed. I knew without a doubt that God was real. I also knew that I needed faith in order to attain salvation. But since Christianity was the only religion I had ever known, it did not occur to me to look elsewhere. The other religions that I had heard about were practiced by people “over there” in other parts of the world, and the poor souls, they were in need of “saving”- at least according to the teachers at my church. I always had a problem with this, though. Saving, that is. To me, God must be Just (and *Alhamdulillah*, I find today that He truly is). I could not understand how God could banish someone to eternal hellfire, because they did not know the truth. I somehow believed that God would forgive our mistakes if we did not know better (‘Adl, I see now...). But since I had no background in any other faith, I continued to try to understand Christianity.

I had always been and continue to be interested in learning about other cultures. From a purely sociological/anthropological point of view, I love to learn about and explore other religions and cultures. I never thought that I would ever adopt any of the cultural differences into my own life, however. Growing up in America, children are often taught that “West is Best” and the rest of the world - the “third world” - is just trying to catch up with us. I didn’t necessarily believe this, but the ethnocentric attitude of those around me had worn off in some areas, and in addition, I had been so thoroughly convinced that I must believe God had a son and that there was really no alternative for me other than to attend the Christian church, believing as I had always done. I was far too fearful of hellfire to accept anything else from just reading about it. I needed to see Islam in action before I would grasp its beauty. That would happen much later.

As I grew older and (somewhat) wiser, I realized that the problems I had had with the Christian church were not just between denominations. I had bounced from church to church by this time, in my late teens (again thinking I had no alternative), until I got to the point where I finally just quit. I could not fathom some of the ideas they were teaching, and I just had too many questions that they could not answer. So I decided I would just believe in God, but not belong to any particular faith. I longed for the “feeling” of God around me that I used to find in my solitary walks in the woods. Christianity was not providing that. I thought I would do better on my own.

That is how I spent the most part of two years. I still considered myself a Christian, but by this time, I certainly was not living any semblance of a moral lifestyle. My search for understanding and the path to God had led me away from the Christian church, but to what? I had never even met anyone who wasn’t Christian. I had no idea where to go, but I wandered around in the darkness for some time. The more I wandered, the further I moved away from God, and the more I moved toward everything I had ever hated. I became totally lost. Finally, knowing that there was nothing for me in the Christian church, but not having any alternatives in front of me, I began to seriously research and try to learn about other religions.

I did some study on my own and took a class in comparative religion. I can’t say at the time I was actually looking for a particular faith, but I was



open to all. I took a class called Cross-Cultural Studies that would ultimately change my life.

It was in this class that my first exposure to Islam occurred. The course offered a study unit on Islam, and the gentleman who spoke to our class brought with him a huge (all Arabic) copy of The Qur'an and some beautiful pictures of mosques from around the world. I remember thinking that the culture of Islam was certainly rich, and I wanted to learn more (even before I knew about the religion). But the more I studied and participated in the class, the more I realized that this religion was not as it had been portrayed in the media. It was tolerant, caring, and brotherly; not fanatical and oppressive as the media would have you believe.

I remember thinking that, for the first time, a door had been opened to me to answer some of the questions I had. Alas, however, the class ended, and I was stuck right where I had started (albeit a lot more informed).

I realized I needed a change in my life to get away from the bad influences I had been running with. So I moved. It was the best thing I ever did. I transferred to another university, and there met the man who is now my husband. He in turn introduced me to other Muslims, and my study increased.

My husband was from Iran, and Shia; so the majority of people that I met at the time were Shia. They were models of the things they were teaching me. In every aspect, they lived what they taught. I respected this above all, since I had seen such hypocrisy in the churches I had attended. It was refreshing to see people who believed so strongly in their deen that they were fearful of Allah for disobeying. They were not concerned with the rest of the world's opinion - only Allah's.

They were not interested in converting me to Shi'ism, but rather, in teaching me about Islam and letting me make my own decisions. Whatever questions I had, they were there to answer. They helped me to begin my library, acquiring books that were not hostile to Shia, but logical and thought out. Logical arguments were convincing, but I wanted to know more about the early days of Islam, so I began reading more about the history of Islam and the 14 Maasoomen (A.S.). I read about figures such as Imam Ali, Imam Hussein (A.S.), and Hazrat Abbas (A.S.). These souls, along with many others in the history of Islam, had been through great struggle for their faith. With the logical arguments I had read in favor of Islam and seeing this faith in practice by my new friends, I knew that these people in the early days of Islam who had struggled so valiantly could not be wrong.

When I read Najul Balagha and the wise words of Imam Ali (A.S.), I knew that this man was surely the brother of the Prophet (S.A.W.) and the best guide for the people after the Prophet Muhammad himself (P.B.U.H. & H.F.). His character, morality, bravery, and wisdom were all patterned after the Prophet himself, and I knew he could not be wrong.

The study took some time, but from the beginning I knew that this was what I had been searching for all my life. I said my *shahadah* formally on my wedding day with many friends as witnesses, although by that time I was already living the life of a Muslim, wearing *hijab* and learning my

prayers. Shortly after that, I decided to eat only Halal meat. Being Shia, I have had two sources of stress in my search for the truth. Firstly, my own family was not supportive of my search, and secondly, the Sunni majority also tends to «disown» those who are Shia. If the convert is in a town with a strong Shia community, this is not a problem, but for me it was. Our town was small, and our Shia community consisted of only about 7 families. *Alhamdulillah*, though, those 7 families were wonderful living examples of Islam, as I have said.

Little by little over the almost 10 years I have been Muslim, I have tried to implement the teachings of Islam into my life. It has not always been easy, as I am in a constant struggle with my nafs. It is truly the «*jihad al-akbar*», and one that I will struggle with the remainder of my life. We, converts, have to remember that Islam was revealed to the people over the space of 23 years not overnight. In our zeal to «*get it right*», we often want to do it all \*now\*. It is best if we take it slow, learning the significance of each act of worship as we go. Then, we are more likely to understand and less likely to turn back when things are difficult.

I thank Allah daily that I have been shown Islam, true and unadulterated, and that I have been given this chance to serve my Lord in the best way possible. I pray that I can only live up to the great responsibility that Allah has given me, and that I will be among the first to be in support of Imam-e-Zamaan (A.S.) when he returns, *Inshallah* (May Allah Hasten His Return).

## **Craig Robertson, Ex-Catholic, Canada:**

### **Story of Journey from Darkness to Light**

●*After being raised in a Catholic household and spending much of his early childhood attending church, Craig rejects faith and takes to life in the fast lane.*

My name is Abdullah Al-Kanadi. I was born in Vancouver, Canada. My family, who were Roman Catholic, raised me as a Roman Catholic until I was 12 years old. I have been Muslim for approximately six years, and I would like to share the story of my journey to Islam with you.

I suppose in any story it's best to start from the beginning. During my childhood, I attended a Catholic religious school and was taught about the Catholic faith, along with other subjects. Religion was always my best class; I excelled academically in the teachings of the Church. I was pressed into service as an 'altar boy' by my parents from a very young age, which pleased my grandparents a great deal; but the more I learned about my religion, the more I questioned it! I have this memory from my childhood, I asked my mother on Mass: "Is our religion the right one?" My mother's answer still rings in my ears to this day: "Craig, they are all the same, they're all good!" Well to me this didn't seem right. What was the point of me learning my religion if they were all equally good!?

At the age of twelve, my maternal grandmother was diagnosed with colon cancer and died a few months later, after a painful battle with the disease. I never realized how deeply her death affected me till later on in life. At the tender age of twelve, I decided I would be an atheist in order to punish God (if you can even fathom such a thing!) I was an angry little boy; I was angry at the world, at myself, and worst of all, at God. I stumbled through my early teenage years trying to do everything I could to impress my new "friends" in public high school. I quickly realized that I had a lot to learn, for being sheltered in a religious school you don't learn what you would in a public school. I pressed all my friends in private to teach me about all the things I did not learn, soon enough I gained the habit of swearing and making fun of people weaker than me. Even though I tried my best to fit in, I never actually did. I would get bullied; girls would make fun of me and so on. For a kid my age, this was devastating. I retreated to myself, into what you would call an 'emotional shell'. My teenage years were filled with misery and loneliness. My poor parents tried to talk to me, but I was belligerent towards them and very disrespectful. I graduated from high school in the summer of 1996 and felt that things would have to change for the better, since I believed they couldn't get any worse! I was accepted in a local technical school and decided that I should further my education and maybe make good money, so that I would be happy. I took a job at a fast-food restaurant by my house to help pay for school.

A couple of weeks before I was to start school, I was invited to move out with some friends from work. To me, this seemed like the answer to my problems! I would forget my family and be with my friends all the time. One night, I told my parents I was going to move out. They told me, I couldn't, and that I wasn't ready for it and that they wouldn't allow it! I was

17 years old and very headstrong; I swore at my parents and said to them all sorts of evil things, which I still regret to this day. I felt emboldened by my new freedom, I felt released, and I could follow my desires as I saw fit. I moved in with my friends and didn't speak to my parents for a long time after that.

I was working and going to school when my roommates introduced me to marijuana. I was in love with it after the first 'puff'! I would smoke a bit when I got home from work to relax and unwind. Soon though, I started to smoke more and more, until during one weekend I had smoked so much, that it was Monday morning and before I knew it, it was time for school. I thought, well, I'll take one day of school off, and go the next day, since they won't possibly miss me. I never returned to school after that. I finally realized how good I had it. All the fast food I could steal and all the drugs I could smoke; who needed school anyways?

I was living a great life, or so I thought; I became the 'resident' bad boy at work, and, consequently, the girls started to pay attention to me like they hadn't in high school. I tried harder drugs, but *Alhamdulillah*, I was saved from the really terrible stuff. The strange thing was when I wasn't high or drunk I was miserable. I felt worthless and completely valueless. I was stealing from work and from friends to help maintain the 'chemical haze'. I became paranoid of the people around me and imagined police officers were chasing me around every corner. I was beginning to crack, and I needed a solution, and I figured that religion would help me.

I remember seeing a movie about witchcraft, and I thought that would be perfect for me. I bought a couple books on Wicca and Nature Worship and found that they encouraged the use of natural drugs so I continued. People would ask me if I believed in God, and we would have the strangest conversations while under the 'influence', but I distinctly remember saying that no, in fact I don't believe in God at all, I believe in many gods as imperfect as me.

Through all this, there was one friend who stuck by me. He was a 'Born Again' Christian and was always preaching to me, even though I would mock his faith at every opportunity. He was the only friend I had at the time who didn't judge me. So when he invited me along to go to a youth weekend camp, I decided to go along. I had no expectations. I thought I would have a huge laugh making fun of all the "Bible Thumpers". During the second evening, they had a huge service in an auditorium. They played all sorts of music which praised God. I watched as the young and old, male and female cried out for forgiveness and shed tears over everything. I was really moved, and I said a silent prayer along the lines of "God! I know I have been a horrible person, please help me, and forgive me and let me start fresh." I felt a surge of emotion come over me, and I felt tears roll down my cheek. I decided at that moment to embrace Jesus Christ as my personal Lord and Savior. I raised my hands in the air and started dancing around (yes, dancing!) All the Christians around me were staring at me in stunned silence; the guy who mocked them and told them how stupid they were for believing in God was dancing and praising God!

I returned to my party home and eschewed all drugs, intoxicants, and girls. I promptly told my friends how they needed to be Christians so they could be saved. I was shocked that they rejected me, because they always used to pay attention to me before. I ended up moving back with my parents after a long absence and used to badger them with the reasons why they should become Christian. They being Catholic felt they were already Christian, but I felt they were not, for they worshipped Saints. I decided to move out again but this time on better terms and was given a job by my grandfather who wanted to help with my “recovery”.

I started to hang out at a Christian “youth house” which was basically a house where teens could go to get away from family pressures and discuss Christianity. I was older than most of the boys, so I became one of those who talked most and try to make the boys feel welcomed. In spite of this, I felt like a fraud for I started drinking and dating again. I would tell the kids about Jesus’ love for them and during the nights would drink. Through all this, my one Christian friend would try to council me and keep me on the right track.

I still remember to this day my first encounter with a Muslim. One of the boys brought his friend to the youth house. He was a Muslim kid whose name I forgot. What I do remember is the boy saying “I brought my friend ‘so and so’, he’s a Muslim, and I want to help him become a Christian”. I was absolutely amazed by this 14-year-old kid; he was calm and friendly! Believe it or not, he defended himself AND Islam against a dozen Christians who were hurling abuses at him and Islam! As we sat there fruitlessly thumbing through our Bibles and getting angrier and angrier, he just sat there, quietly smiling and telling us about worshipping others besides God and how, yes, there is love in Islam. He was like a gazelle encircled by a dozen hyenas, yet the entire time, he was calm and friendly and respectful. It blew my mind!

The Muslim kid left a copy of The Quran on the shelf, either he forgot it or left it on purpose, I don’t know, but I started reading it. I soon became infuriated with this book when I saw that it made more sense than the Bible. I threw it against the couch and walked away, seething with anger; yet, after I read it, I had a niggling doubt at my core. I did my best to forget about the Muslim kid and just enjoy my time with my friends at the youth house. The youth group used to go to various Churches on weekends to prayer events and Saturday nights were spent in a huge Church instead of at the bar. I remember being at one such event called ‘The Well’, and I felt so close to God and wanted to humble myself and show my Creator my love for Him. I did what felt natural, I prostrated. I prostrated like Muslims do in the daily prayers, yet I didn’t know what I was doing. All I knew was that it felt really good... It felt right more than anything else I had ever done. I felt very pious and spiritual and continued on my path, but, as usual, I started to feel things slipping away.

The Pastor always taught us that we must submit our will to God’s, and I wanted nothing more than to do that; but I didn’t know how! I always prayed “Please God, make my will Yours, make me follow Your will” and so on, but nothing ever happened. I felt myself slowly slipping away from

the Church as my faith ebbed away. It was at this time that my best friend, the Christian man who had helped me come to Christ, along with another close friend of mine, raped my girlfriend who I had been with for two years. I was in the other room too drunk to know what was happening and unable to stop anything. A couple of weeks later, it was revealed that the man who ran the youth house had molested one of the boys that I was friends with.

My world was shattered! I had been betrayed by so many of my friends, people who were supposed to be close to God and working towards Paradise. I had nothing left to give; I was empty again. I walked around as before, blindly and without direction, just working and sleeping and partying. My girlfriend and I broke up soon afterwards. My guilt, rage and sadness encompassed my entire being. How could my Creator allow such a thing to happen to me? How selfish was I!

A little while after, my manager at work told me that a “Moslem” would be working with us, he was really religious, and we should try to be decent around him. The minute this “Moslem” came in, he started Da’wah. He wasted no time in telling us all about Islam, and everyone told him they didn’t want to hear anything about Islam, other than me! My soul was crying out, and even my stubbornness could not squelch the cries. We started working together and discussing our respective beliefs. I had given up on Christianity completely, but when he started asking me questions, my faith surged, and I felt I was a ‘Crusader’ defending the Faith from this evil “Moslem”.

The fact of the matter was that this particular “Moslem” wasn’t evil like I had been told. In fact, he was better than me. He didn’t swear; he never got angry and was always calm, kind, and respectful. I was truly impressed and decided that he would make an excellent Christian. We went back and forth asking things about each other’s religions, but after a time I felt myself getting more and more defensive. At one point, I became very angry... Here I was trying to convince him of the truth of Christianity, and I felt it was he who was on the truth! I started to feel more and more confused and didn’t know what to do. All I knew was that I had to increase my faith, so I jumped in my car and roared off to ‘The Well’. I was convinced that if I could only pray there again, I could get the feeling back and the strong faith and then I could convert the Muslim. I eventually got there, after speeding the entire way, and found it was closed! No one was in sight; I frantically looked around for another similar event so I could ‘charge up’ but found nothing. Dejected, I returned home.

I started to realize that I was being pushed in a certain direction, so I prayed over and over to my Creator to surrender my will to His. I felt that my prayer was being answered; I went home and laid in bed, and at that moment I realized that I needed to pray like never before. I sat up in bed and cried, ‘Jesus, God, Buddha, whoever You are, please, please guide me, I need You! I have done so much evil in my life, and I need Your help. If Christianity is the correct way then make me strong, and if it is Islam, then bring me to it!’ I stopped praying, and the tears went away, and deep within my soul I felt calm, I knew what the answer was. I went to work the next day and said to the Muslim brother “how do I say ‘hi’ to you?” He asked me

what I meant and I said, “I wanted to become a Muslim”. He looked at me and said “Allahu Akbar!” We hugged for a good minute or so, and I thanked him for everything, and I began my journey into Islam.

I look back at all the events that happened in my life over time, and I realize that I was being prepared to become a Muslim. I was shown so much mercy from God. Out of all that happened in my life, there was something to learn. I learned the beauty of the Islamic prohibition of intoxicants, the prohibition of illegal sex, and the need for the *Hijab*. I am finally on an even keel, no more am I too much in one direction; I am living a moderate life and doing my best to be a decent Muslim.

There are always challenges, as I am sure many of you have felt, as have I. But through these challenges, through these emotional pains, we become stronger; we learn and, I hope, turn to God. For those of us who have accepted Islam at some point in our lives, we truly are blessed and fortunate. We have been given the chance, a chance for the greatest mercy! Mercy which we don’t deserve, but still will, God willing, be given on the Day of Resurrection. I have reconciled with my family and have started looking to start my own God willing. Islam truly is a way of life, and even if we suffer poor treatment by fellow Muslims or non Muslims, we must always remember to be patient and turn only to God.

If I have said anything incorrect it is from me, and if anything that I have said is correct it is from God. All Praises are due to God, and may God bestow His mercy and blessings upon his noble Prophet Muhammad, Amen.

May God increase our faith and make it in accords to that which pleases Him and grant us His Paradise, Amen!



## Sister Tania Bowling - Germany

### Early life:

Sister Tania Bowling was born in 1976 in Germany which is one of the developed and important countries in Europe and the world. Germany has a population of 65 million people; 3 million of them are Muslims who hail from Germany, Turkey, Iran, or Arab countries. Most of the Islamic community resides in the cities of Munich, Hamburg, Frankfurt, Aachen and Hannover. Sister Tania has been brought up in a Christian family that had the traditions that characterize Western families.

She had the honor of embracing the Islamic Faith according to *Ahlul-Bait's* (A.S.) teachings in 1999 as she left Christianity at the age of twenty-two after a period of «*loss and self-ignorance*» until Allah took her hand and rescued her from the bottom of darkness into the splendor of light.

### Intellectual Loss Stage:

Tania was living in atmospheres she describes as: «*We were at that time living together, side by side, but none of us cared about the other. Everyone lived for oneself and for the sake of oneself; we shared loneliness and isolation. I do not exaggerate if I say that each one of us did not even live with oneself that one had abandoned; we did not even think about our future. None of us dared to question himself or herself: Why do I live? Why was I born? Where have I come from? And where am I heading?*

«*Everyone was aimlessly wandering astray in dark alleys and turns. We were all loitering in the alleys of mob life, without thinking about a shelter or a cozy home. We spent our lives in a loss of goals, ethics, doctrine, and morale.*»

### Reasons for Abandoning Religion in the West:

This was an early reaction that occurred towards religion in the West as a result of the acts of the clergy and the distortion of the Christian religion which has failed to perform its functions and role in the life of the Christian individual and community; the clergy have set for their societies laws and regulations that have made the religion of Christ the most complicated of the major and positive religions, in contrast with Jesus (A.S.) who had presented the faith with simplicity.

Christian scholars thought that, by doing so, they have founded an intellectual structure that is good for regulating the lives of the individual and the community. However, once those theories were put into practice, it was clear that they were not right as they stumbled and shook. It was not possible for those teachings and principles to survive in the land of reality; the fruit they harvested was utter failure and falling into bitter disasters, which backfired against those teachings, or rather against religion in general. Consequently, the West generally lived in a state of loss.

Sister Tania says: «*More than 50% of the people and more than 60% of the young men and women in our area had a state of loneliness despite the apparent friendship, companionship, and family ties. Actually, all the human relations, in their materialistic and apparent forms, were for the sake of amusement, playing, and time-killing. These people could only stand*

*them for a few hours of their nights or days, while spending the rest of their lives isolated from others in a room or an apartment.»*

### **The journey from Darkness to Light:**

Sister Tania lived for twenty years in such an environment, until she found her soul, thanks to pure Islam represented by *Ahlul-Bait's* (A.S.) School. Having recovered that soul which she had lost all that time, Tania knew about her Lord Who had been, before that, strange to her.

The beginning of the story of her journey from darkness into light was when she met by chance a Muslim young woman wearing *hijab* in a market in the city of Hamburg. Sister Tania describes the incident by saying: *«I was then impetuous, like any German young woman; therefore, I made fun at the hijab of that woman and degraded her for it. I said to her: What kind of illness do you have to cover your body as such?»*

*The veiled girl answered quietly and soberly: «A woman's veil, shyness, and chastity testify to the soundness of her soul. Hijab gives women a moral freedom that enables her to maintain her social security, while nudity is contrary to common sense.»*

Tania says: *«I categorically rejected what she said and went on with my friends to do what I was doing. However, I kept thinking about that veiled woman's argument, self-confidence, knowledge, and commitment to her principles until I had the opportunity, driven by curiosity, to go to Imam Ali's (A.S.) Mosque in Hamburg. There, I talked and had dialogues with a number of Shia Muslims of different ethnicities who had gathered there. I noticed that they had strong arguments and evidence. I had good ties with a number of them to get to know the facts of which I had not been aware before. Gradually, my mind and soul began to be attracted by their ideas and beliefs, and I started to feel as though I had been a Muslim just like them, one who did not differ with them in anything.»*

Sister Tania was lucky to learn about Islam directly, not through Christianity that has tried to penetrate Islamic thought via an approach of skepticism, deception, and fabrication of facts to distort the Islamic history, principles, and culture under the banner of Orientalism.

Orientalists have introduced their opinions and prejudices as they interpreted events, discussed texts, and analyzed issues. They have looked at Islam from their own window and threw on it their own shadows in a bid to change its original milestones. Thus, they have confused between Islam as an orthodox religion and the deteriorating situation of Muslims, judging, as Kiesling did, that Islam was a dead religion!

### **Brilliant Islamic Values:**

Sister Tania says: *«What caught my interest in Islam was the Muslims' moral relationship with their Lord; their strong ties with their families; the existence of a purpose of life to them; their solidarity that knows no boundaries, be that at the racial, national or geographic origin levels, in addition to their attachment to their religion and the established belief in their ideological issues.»*

She adds: *«Muslims have taken these things from Islam itself. They lead their daily lives according to these principles, to some extent. Of course had*

*I met Muslims estranged from their religion and Islam, I would not have had confidence in Islam.»*

### **Ahlul-Bait's (AS) Role in Preserving Islam:**

Sister Tania has been extremely attracted to reading Islamic intellectual and doctrinal books. She first read The Holy Quran, then the *Hadiths* of the Prophet and his Household (A.S.). This has added to the strength of her faith and the awakening of her mind and heart besides brightening her face with the light of faith due to these *Hadiths*' role in addressing the human being's problems and deepening their religious awareness.

Sister Tania has found in these teachings the spiritual security and tranquility she had been lacking. She describes her situation after converting to the doctrine of Ahlul-Bait (A.S.) by saying:

*«I have gained from The Quran and the sayings of the Prophet and Ahlul-Bait (A.S.) all that a human being could wish for as for one's religion, though I have lost everything because of embracing Islam! However, on the other hand, I have found my self and gained my soul. At that time, I could find everything except Allah, but still I felt that I was in a state of loss and confusion.*

*Today, after I have found my self - which I had lost for twenty years - and knew my Lord Who was strange to me, I have obtained everything, and indeed all that I wanted, thanks to Islam.*

*I have obtained moral freedom besides brothers and sisters in Allah everywhere: in Hamburg, in Germany, rather throughout the world, and most importantly, I have found, among many other things, Allah's message to humanity that He had sent centuries ago; I found it in the closet of history treasures, so I took it, and this is the greatest capital in my life.*

*I have turned the page of a night that had persisted for twenty years of my life through the dawn of a new day. The sun of Islam has granted me warmth and rekindled in me activity and vitality after a long winter hibernation that continued for many years.»*

Sister Tania describes her relationship with others, especially her family after being honored by becoming a Muslim. She says: *«Despite suffering from ostensible loneliness and many problems with my family because of being honored by Islam, I still live with my father and mother. Of course, we have had, throughout this long period, numerous diatribes and discussions; nevertheless, they have realized that I am serious about my affiliation to Islam, which greatly reduced the intensity of argument between us. In fact, my parents now admire my Islamic manners and personality as they have noticed that my actions are now better than in the past.»*

With this firm will and deep-rooted determination, Tania has been able to overcome many of the obstacles that emerged in her way to Islam. Thanks to her high intellectual potentials, which she had acquired from the knowledge of Ahlul-Bait's (A.S.) School, she has managed to withstand the opposite currents and prove her professional competence. She is a model to every human being who clings to his or her principles heedless of anyone who might blame them for that.

She has a wish: *«I hope that The Almighty guide my father and my mother to Islam.»*



## Christopher and Phillip embrace Islam

**Following their pure innate nature, young Christopher and Phillip embrace Islam.**

*«Every newborn is given birth according to human nature; his parents turn him into a Jew, a Christian or a Marian.»* And today's tale is only a testimony to the truth in this sacred *Hadith*. Christopher and his brother Phillip were born to Catholic parents, and their mother decided from the beginning to leave them to choose their religion distant from any family or social influences.

*«I want to become a photographer in order to convey the accurate picture about Muslims.»* With these words, 16-year old Sayyed, formerly Christopher, started his talk in which he dealt with how Allah guided him to Islam and the reasons why he embraced the true faith.

Sayyed went on to say, *«I approached Islam with a pleased soul and full conviction. I can only thank my mother for her role in lighting the path for me. And I repeat my thanks because she let me choose and did not force me any day to determine my religious identity.»*

Sayyed added saying, *«My mother embraced Islam almost two and a half years ago after she got married to an Egyptian Muslim, and Allah guided her through him after she had been introduced to Islam through her readings as guided by her husband. The interest in Islam shifted from my mother to me and to Phillip, my brother, so we together decided to follow in our mother's footsteps and embrace Islam. This we achieved when we declared our acceptance of Islam a year and a half ago before our small family which is comprised of my mother and her husband. As for now, we are with you here at the Islamic Center to celebrate the Eid and to declare before you that we have accepted Islam before this crowd of our Muslim brethren on a Day when we celebrate the end of the glorious Month of Ramadan.»*

Sayyed, who and whose family live in Krames town in the Lower Austria Province, says that he maintains his relationship with his family although it rejected the idea of his embracing Islam as he had personally expected. His acceptance of Islam and that of his brother, Phillip, has been denounced by the family members. The director of the Islamic Center of Vienna had announced after the Eid prayers yesterday that both youths, Christopher (Sayyed) and Phillip, wanted to declare their acceptance of Islam before the worshippers. Having pronounced the Shahada amidst clamoring Takbir shouts by the worshippers, the director accompanied the family for a tour in the center's courtyard where he gave them presents.

In an interview with both Muslim youths, I asked Sayyed, *«What attracted you to Islam? Why did you choose Islam rather than any other faith?»* The young Muslim man kept silent for a moment then answered, *«I do not know ... All I can say is that I have read about it, and the more I read the more I loved it... But what attracted me the most to Islam is that I felt that the Muslims worship God in the most perfect way. They continue to be in touch with Him all day long, day and night, which is proven by the prayers obligation which we perform five times during the day and the*

night... As regarding the way followers of other religions worship, it is confined to certain days of the week, if they perform it at all.»

«Did you fast during the Month of Ramadan?» Sayyed's answer came very quickly as if he was waiting to be asked. He smiled and said, «Yes, Praise to Allah! I fasted the entire Month of Ramadan except for one day during which I was sick and I had a school examination that day. It is the first time that I fasted, and it was hard especially the first days.» Then he said, «My mother challenged me that I would not be able to fast, but I fasted, and nobody believed it.» As for Phillip, his 12-year-old brother, he wished to be able to fast the whole Month of Ramadan next year after having been through the experience of fasting for one day this year.

Sayyed expressed his hope to be able to learn Arabic and memorize The Holy Quran especially since «Allah has blessed me and my brother with memorizing Surat al-Fatiha and some short Suras, and this enabled us to perform the five obligatory prayers,» according to him.

As regarding his future plans, Sayyed said, «I want to become a photographer in order to convey the accurate picture about Muslims and Islam. I have seen many films which distort Muslims' image, and I have seen many good films about Islam made by individuals whom I regard as my supreme models and who have embraced Islam. I will study Islam at Vienna University, for I have come to know that they have a good Islamic studies program.»

As soon as the noontime call for prayers (athan) was pronounced, Sayyed and Phillip looked at us and said, «Do you permit us to go?» They stood up, greeted us, and then went at the time when tears filled our eyes!

The director of the Islamic Center of Vienna says that hundreds of Austrians have declared their acceptance of Islam inside the Islamic Center during the years of its existence in Vienna. Since the Center was established, 1,100 persons accepted Islam, and 700 Austrians accepted Islam during the past ten years; most of them are youths.

The director went on to say, «Certainly there are special programs to absorb the Muslim converts and to assess the extent of their true desire to embrace Islam. These programs include meetings which are held 4 times a week for three months. First, we are interested in the Muslim convert articulating both Shahadas so he would be a follower of the Islamic faith if Allah decrees for him to die [so he may die as a Muslim]. Then he joins orientation programs which give him an idea about the religion and its basic tenets without going into details which may confuse him... We acquaint the Muslim convert with the tolerance of the Islamic faith and with its logic, for there is wisdom behind each ruling in Islam. We are keen about explaining to him the wisdom behind the praying and fasting obligations and support it with brief booklets in German.»

The director explains saying, «There are some who come to us to declare their acceptance of Islam, but they retract during the orientation period. Some of them wish to apply for a job which preconditions the applicant to be a Muslim, and there may be one who wishes to marry a Muslim woman, so he accepts Islam in order to marry her.»

The Islamic Center receives more than 30,000 Austrian citizens per year who wish to become familiar with Islam without an intermediary, and most of these individuals are university and school students. The center sets the suitable appointments for receiving them. The Center will also organize this coming March an open mosque week during which guests will be welcomed by the Center amidst an Islamic atmosphere in which they get to know how Muslims pray. There will also be tours inside the Center, and prayers will take place under leadership of cadres who are qualified in their language and religion.



## Search for the Truth

### Fatima

«Fatima» 28, is a young Mexican lady who was raised by a Jewish family in a Jewish society. How was the moment when she converted to Islam and chose it as her religion? What is the story behind her embracing Islam, actually behind her true birth?

### She personally narrates her story saying:

*«Four years ago, my life did not have any meaning, and I had many questions looking for answers. I did not find in the books of the Jews and Christians what quenches my thirst and fills my mind and heart, especially with regard with man's direct relationship with God, Exalted and Great is He.»*

### The beginning was in London

She continues saying, *«When I was in London for my university study, I came to know a Muslim Arab family. My relationship with it grew stronger. The calm and stability which the mother enjoyed drew my attention when I asked her about the reason. She said, 'Islam has guaranteed woman's rights and raised her status and position with her husband and family. It put forth for both spouses a program to follow in raising their children.' This statement was the start of the spark that impressed my mind and heart. It increased my insistence on looking for the truth.»*

### Entering a Mosque

Fatima recounts her recollections and says, *«I went out one day to one of London's major recreational parks. On my way, I passed by a big mosque, so I entered it. I found an old man with a long white beard. He welcomed me very much and asked me very politely to wear the hijab (covering) out of respect for the mosque. I found no objection within me. Then I entered with the old man who sat with me and gave me a copy of The Holy Qur'an as a gift in addition to books in English which explain Islamic concepts. I came out of the mosque with joy and comfort filling my heart. I started reading the books during periods with intervals. I started attending weekly held seminars inside the mosque which helped me understand Islam's lofty meanings, and that it puts forth a program for the Muslim individual to follow during his lifetime and even after his death. What attracted my attention in Islam is the Muslim individual's belief in all prophets and messengers from the first prophet, who is Adam, peace with him, and even Jesus, peace with him. Also I was attracted by the direct relationship between a Muslim and his God without a middleman. I kept struggling inside me for two years torn between my love and strong desire to embrace Islam and fear of my family and its rejection if I publicly declare my acceptance of Islam.*

*«Suddenly, however, when I was attending a lecture inside the mosque, I stood before the imam and declared my desire to embrace Islam and wear the hijab. His happiness was great and mine greater because I now am a Muslim, and I wear the hijab.»*

### **Family after my Conversion to Islam**

Fatima moves on saying: *«I did not stay long in London after my acceptance of Islam and the wearing of the hijab. Praise to God, I did not face any difficulty in assimilating with the society there especially since I was still studying at the university. After some time, I returned to Mexico to live with my family. My father noticed the change in my behavior and conduct as well as the scarf which I always put on my head till he suddenly entered my room and found me performing the prayers, and that was the big shock. He did not accept the notion that I converted to Islam at all, and he did not even give me a chance to explain to him why I embraced Islam. My mother was shocked, and my brother was taken by surprise. All my friends and relatives kept their distance from me. The Jewish society is cemented and closely knit; it does not accept any changes inside it. My father decided to expel me from the house, and my mother could not prevent him. Rather, she remained silent and did not comment. Both my parents refused to speak to me for a full year. As for my brother, he was not convinced about my conversion to Islam, and he was not convinced about how I looked wearing the hijab. I was not angry with my family. A Muslim is characterized by patience when it comes to his parents, and he has to be kind to them. I left home and lived by myself, remaining in touch with my family members in order to assure them about myself and try once more to get closer to them.»*

### **Merging Into the Society**

Fatima says, *«I did not find any difficulty in the Mexican society accepting my embracing Islam, but many friends and acquaintances thought that I had cancer, so I was wearing the scarf in order to cover my falling hair, or perhaps I had just given birth, so I am now covering my head for fear of catching a cold! I used to take advantage of this opportunity to explain Islam's lofty meanings. I found myself surrounded by the sisters who were willing to embrace Islam. Praise to Allah, I was able to influence many of my close friends who did, indeed, eventually embrace Islam.»*

### **Satan Insinuates**

*«As is the case with any other human being, Satan tried to penetrate inside my heart and mind more than once to make me revert from Islam. Mexico is a hot country, and wearing the scarf in it is difficult due to the high temperature. Satan kept trying to enter by insinuating to me that if I took off the scarf because of the hot weather, nothing would happen, and there was nobody looking over my shoulders. But I kept seeking refuge with Allah from Satan, reciting the two Quranic Chapters that protect from Satan and seeking Allah's forgiveness a great deal.»*

### **Vision Changed my Brother's Heart**

*«After a while, I was surprised when my brother asked me, 'Do you have a picture of your Prophet, Muhammad?' I answered him in the negative. He said to me, 'I think that your Prophet, Muhammad, came to me in a vision and said to me: We do not force anyone to embrace Islam...' After this vision, I sensed change in the way my brother was treating me. He became*

more receptive of the way I looked in the *hijab*, and he always kept talking to me and visiting me.”

### **Thanks to Allah**

Fatima concludes saying, «*I praise Allah, The Most Exalted, The Most Great, for the blessing of Islam which opened my heart and mind, filling my senses with guidance and love. I praise Allah, Glory and Exaltation belongs to Him, because He chose me to get out of the dark into the light. Islam is the religion of peace, love, solidarity and tolerance. It respects all divinely revealed religions. I learned from it self-confidence, self-pride, and that the most Praised and Exalted One is near; He answers the plea.*»

[My Son («*Waladi*») magazine, Vol. 64, Muharam 1424 A.H.]

## Danish Muslim:

### Abdul Wahid

The heart of a Danish rock singer, who now calls himself «*Abdul-Wahid*», inclined by instinct towards Islam; so he traveled to more than one Arab country looking for the faith till Allah guided him to declare his Islam.

{*They have been guided to the path of the One Who is worthy of (all) praise*} (Qur'an, 22:24)

Peterson narrates the story of how he became a Muslim saying, «*I was a young man with a good voice, and I worked as a singer moving between restaurants and night clubs to sing. My utmost dream was to achieve fame. But suddenly, without an arrangement, I felt that a call was coming from the skies inviting me to become familiar with Allah and to follow His religion.*»

«*At that time,*» Peterson goes on, «*I did not know anything about Islam, and it never entertained my mind. I was a Christian only by name, so I decided to study different religions in order to find out the true one. I actually became convinced that Islam is the only path to Allah: It is the religion that addresses the mind and the heart simultaneously. All of this happened around the year 1982.*»

Answering a question about how he became familiar with Islam, especially since his country had only a small number of Muslims, he said, «*I traveled to a number of Arab countries and mastered the Arabic language. When I returned to Denmark, I decided to dedicate my life to invite others to embrace Islam amidst a materialistic culture that recognizes nothing other than materialism.*»

Peterson emphasizes that the main thing that makes him incline towards Allah, The Most Exalted One and The Most Great, was that he was not influenced by anything materialistic in order to embrace Islam; nobody invited him to embrace this creed.

After having embraced Islam, Peterson became active in charity work by overseeing a number of charitable projects in a group of poor countries such as founding a school to educate boys and girls in Afghanistan. He now presides over the Danish Muslim Aid Society which has participated in rebuilding 500 homes in Kashmir destroyed by an earthquake.

### Mosque Dream

About his dreams, he says, «*We only lack a big mosque that becomes a place where the Muslims meet. Since I became a Muslim, I always dreamed of building this mosque. We have actually obtained the necessary permits from the Danish government, and we now only have to start implementing this project after having collected the needed donations. So, it does not make sense that Denmark's second religion should have no place of worship.*»

According to Peterson, the early Muslims entered Denmark in the late 1960s and early 1970s, and they were laborers who were not basically religious. Ultimately, Islam did not spread then. But the true Islamic renaissance started at the end of the 1970s and early 1980s because of the presence of Muslim immigrants and due to a number of Danish people being interested in the Islamic Faith. Also, the September 11th incidents and

the crisis of the caricatures that were derogatory to the Prophet (P.B.U.H.) increased the interest of the Danish people in this religion.

Regarding the reasons why many Westerners are now embracing Islam, Peterson explains saying, «*People here in the West are drowned in materialistic societies. Lately, they realized that no matter how many joys and pleasures life may have, it will in the end disappear. From here, some of them started searching for the spiritual aspects. Just as we have started finding many atheists, we now find many of those who search for a religion that grants them psychological peace. For this reason, I think that Islam's future in Europe in general is quite great because it is the only creed that instills self-calm into everything.*»

The paradox here is that Denmark is regarded as the first country from which campaigns were launched against Islam and the Holy Prophet, Muhammad, through insulting caricatures drawn by some Danish cartoonists. But these intense events prompted many Europeans to develop an interest, research, and find out what Islam is and who this individual, whose image many of those who are hostile to Islam try to distort, is. The insulting caricatures made them desire to become familiar with this personality whom we see as great while they are ignorant about it. This became a cause either in their embracing Islam or evidence against them so they will not say that they did not hear about it.

## **British Actress Inspired by Prophet's (P.B.U.H) Life**

### **Myriam François-Cerrah Embraces Islam**

**I embraced Islam after graduating from Cambridge. Prior to that I was a skeptical Catholic; a believer in God but with a mistrust of organized religion.**

The Qur'an was pivotal for me. I first tried to approach it in anger, as part of an attempt to prove my Muslim friend wrong. Later, I began reading it with a more open mind.

The opening of Al-Fatiha, with its address to the whole of mankind, psychologically stopped me in my tracks. It spoke of previous scriptures in a way which I both recognized but also differed. It clarified many of the doubts I had about Christianity. It made me an adult as I suddenly realized that my destiny and my actions had consequences for which I alone would be held responsible.

In a world governed by relativism, it outlined objective moral truths and the foundation of morality. As someone who'd always had a keen interest in philosophy, The Qur'an felt like the culmination of all of this philosophical cogitation. It combined Kant, Hume, Sartre and Aristotle. It somehow managed to address and answer the deep philosophical questions posed over centuries of human existence and answer its most fundamental one, 'why are we here?' In the Prophet Muhammad (P.B.U.H), I recognized a man who was tasked with a momentous mission, like his predecessors, Moses (p.b.u.h.), Jesus (p.b.u.h.) and Abraham (p.b.u.h.). I had to pick apart much of the Orientalist libel surrounding him in order to obtain accurate information, since the historical relativism which people apply to some degree when studying other historical figures, is often completely absent, in what is a clear attempt to disparage his person.

I think many of my close friends thought I was going through another phase and would emerge from the other side unscathed, not realizing that the change was much more profound. Some of my closest friends did their best to support me and understand my decisions. I have remained very close to some of my childhood friends and through them I recognize the universality of the Divine message, as God's values shine through in the good deeds any human does, Muslim or not.

I have never seen my conversion as a 'reaction' against, or an opposition to my culture. In contrast, it was a validation of what I've always thought was praiseworthy, whilst being a guide for areas in need of improvement. I also found many mosques not particularly welcoming and found the rules and protocol confusing and stressful. I did not immediately identify with the Muslim community. I found many things odd and many attitudes perplexing. The attention given to the outward over the inward continues to trouble me deeply.

There is a need for a confident, articulate British Muslim identity which can contribute to the discussions of our time. Islam is not meant to be an alien religion; we shouldn't feel like we've lost all trace of ourselves. Islam is a validation of the good in us and a means to rectify the bad. Islam is about always having balance, and I think the Prophet's (p.b.u.h.) message was fundamentally about having balance and equilibrium in all that we do.

The Prophet's (p.b.u.h.) message was always that you repel bad with good that you always respond to evil with good and always remember that God loves justice so even when people are committing serious injustices against you, you have a moral responsibility and a moral obligation in front of God to always uphold justice and never yourself transgress those limits.

Prophet Mohammad (p.b.u.h.) said: 'Forgive him who wrongs you. Join him who cuts you off. Do good to him who does evil to you, and speak the truth even if it be against yourself.'

Islam's beauty really becomes to its own when it becomes manifest, and it becomes manifest when you make it into a tool for the betterment of society, human kind, and the world.

The ideal from an Islamic perspective is for ethics to become lived ethics, to become an applied body of values, and not to remain, unfortunately as it often is, cloistered in the mosque of somewhere which is somehow divorced from reality.

Myriam Francois-Cerrah became popular when she was a child for acting in the 90's hit film 'Sense and Sensibility.' Now she is gaining more popularity for being one of a growing number of educated middle class female converts to Islam in Britain.

She has recently contributed to a series of videos on Islam produced in the U.K. titled (Inspired by Muhammad (p.b.u.h.)).



## «And they were guided to the Path of the most Praised One»

### Dr. Ingrid Mattson

Ingrid Mattson, 48, is originally from Canada, and she holds a Ph.D. degree in Islamic studies. She is a political activist in North America. Dr. Mattson was born in Ontario, and she studied philosophy at the University of Waterloo and earned her Ph.D. in Islamic studies from the University of Chicago in 1999. Her subject was equality in Islam.

Presently, she works as professor of Islamic studies and director of the Macdonald Center for Islamic studies and Islamic-Christian Relations in the Hartford Institute in Connecticut State. She spent a period as Afghan refugee relief volunteer in Pakistan during the years 1987 and 1988. She was chosen in 2001 as Vice President then as President in 2006 of the Islamic Society of North America (ISNA), one of the most prominent Islamic organizations in the United States. Mattson earns a great deal of respect in religious and political circles in the United States. She was guest of honor in many celebrations by the U.S. Department of State. She also spoke at religious ceremonies for the Democratic Party's National Convention in Denver in 2008 and in the inauguration ceremony for U.S. President Barrack Obama on January 20, 2009.

**Mattson embraced Islam during the last year of her university studies.**

### Her Story with Islam:

She grew up as a non-practicing Christian, and the beginning of her thinking about Islam was through her passion for arts. Dr. Mattson narrates her trips to major museums in Toronto, Montreal and Chicago till she visited the Louvre Museum in Paris and was dazzled by the painting arts across stages of human history. Then she met a group of Muslims about whom she says, *«I met people who never built statues or corporeal paintings for their God. When I asked them, they answered that Islam is very sensitive about paganism and person worship, that getting to know Allah is very easy: by contemplating on His creations.»*

They were students from West Africa studying in a Paris suburb, and their excellent norms of conduct were the ones that attracted me to Islam. Their behavior was a translation of the Sunnah of the Prophet Muhammad. I did not know at the time the Prophet or anything about Islam. They were characterized by beautiful humanitarian attributes, and they were very generous, sharing with me their food and housing. During my successive travels in the Islamic world, I sensed the same humanitarian characteristics, the love of giving, sharing, and generosity, so I came to know the Prophet Muhammad through his followers.

*«When I traveled to Pakistan, I spent a period of time as Afghan refugee relief volunteer. There, I married a young Egyptian Muslim man, and we did not have a lot of money. Few days after our marriage, I returned to the camp of Afghan refugees. An Afghani woman approached me and asked me in a shy way to show her what my groom had gifted to me, but I showed her my modest ring and told her that I had to borrow the wedding gown. Signs of sorrow and pity showed on the woman's face. A week later, the woman*

*who had lost her husband and children and was expelled from her home returned to give me the traditional Afghani wedding gown. The gift which I received was the most exceptional than at any other time before. It was not the outfit but the indication of pure sympathy that was one of the sweetest fruits of true conviction.»*

Dr. Ingrid goes on to say, «*My husband used to tell me about the extent of his admiration of a particular Muslim Afghani woman, referring to her intelligence and generosity and how she was always keen about her tough trips to the refugee camps and orphanages, providing the Afghans with assistance and meals. When I finally met her, I found out that the woman was covering her entire body from top to tiptoes in the traditional Islamic garb. I realized with some amazement that my husband had never seen her before, nor did he ever see her face, yet he knew her from her behavior the impacts of which she had left on others.»*

From these stances, Ingrid started her journey to get to know Islam which was concluded with her embracing Islam so she would thereafter set out seeking knowledge then making her way in the field of Islamic Da'wah.

Ingrid goes on to say, «*In the summer of 1987, I was riding the train out to British Columbia to start a tree-planting job in the mountains. I had just finished my undergraduate degree in philosophy and had only recently begun my personal study of Islam. I came across Fazlur Rahman [al-Ansari]'s Islam in a bookstore a few days before my trip. Reading that book as I traveled across the Canadian prairies, I made the decision to apply to graduate school in Islamic Studies. His book sparked in me a keen desire to study the classical heritage of Islamic theology and law. Going a step further, I wrote a letter to Rahman (this was before we all used email) describing my situation and inquiring if I might be able to study with him. I dropped the letter in a post box somewhere in the Rockies and forgot about it until I returned east in August. There I found a hand-written note from him, inviting me to come to the University of Chicago to study with him. Rahman died before I arrived in Chicago, but it was his book and his encouragement that inspired me to start on the path to scholarship that I have found so rewarding.*

### **Her Contributions:**

Ingrid established the first Islamic religious program in the United States. In 2001, she was elected President of the Islamic Society of North America (ISNA) which has about 20,000 members in the United States and Canada, and as many as 350 mosques and Islamic centers are affiliated with it. Dr. Mattson is regarded as the first woman to occupy this post in ISNA's history. She tries to introduce the Islamic faith to the American people in a better way in order to stop the growing of Islam-phobia attitudes. She calls on the American news media, which has undertaken on its shoulders to distort Islam's image and spread fear of the Muslims, to be more precise and objective in whatever it publishes and airs about Islam and Muslims.

Ingrid has said, «*We try to introduce ourselves because we are looked at, as Muslim women, in a negative way,*» rejecting what is said about the tough condition of woman in the Muslim society. Responding to fallacies of the Pope of the Vatican, Benedictus XVI, which reflect obvious ignorance of

Islam, Ingrid says that she feels «*disappointed*» with the recent statements of the Pope about Islam, jihad, and violence. She explains saying, «*The obvious connection between Islam and a religion in the essence of which violence is found is not true at all. If we start comparing between the violence that was committed in the name of the Church and that committed in the name of Islam, this comparison will take a great deal of time,*» a reference to the Church's Courts of Inquisition and Crusades.

Among what she stated to the press is this: «*Islam was not revealed only to the black and brown people. Strange! When a Black American becomes Muslim, they say that this is understood. But when I, the White American woman, embrace it, they say that I committed apostasy, as if I have to choose between my color and my religion of Islam.*»

Ingrid applied the same to the subject of *hijab*, regarding that there are different views in this subject. Should women uncover her hair, face, shoulders, arms or feet? She explained saying that *hijab* means covering. The Sunnah says, «*A Muslim woman has to cover her body outside her home.*» Ingrid says that the Western civilization has tried to establish that seeing and touching are among means to getting to know the truth. This manifested itself when they depicted their gods through sculpture and painting. But the Islamic civilization does not accept optical representation as a means to remember and honor Allah and to honor people. Knowing Allah lies in contemplating on the greatness of His creation and creative might.

Instead of drawing Prophet Muhammad, we find the Prophet's name inscribed in mosques side by side with Allah's Attributes and verses of The Holy Qur'an. The best visual representation of the Prophet and his Sunnah is by keeping his traditions alive.

### **«... And they were guided to the Path of The Most Praised One»**

Sean Oliver Stone: *«Embracing Islam does not mean abandoning Christianity or Judaism but recognition of Muhammad who is the continuation of both of these creeds, and my God remains the same, One having no partner.»*

Sean Stone, 27, son of Oscar winner international producer Oliver Stone, has embraced Islam and the Shiite Ja'fari School of Thought in Iran on the 14th of February of this year as he was filming a documentary. He pointed out that he accepted a new name for himself «*Ali Sean*».

But Sean stressed that embracing Islam does not mean abandoning Judaism or Christianity in which he was born. Rather, according to him, «*It means accepting Muhammad as the Prophet just as I accepted other.*»

Ali Sean has visited many places in Iran in order to shoot a documentary film there about the Sufi poet and thinker Jalal ad-Din al-Rumi. He expressed his being greatly influenced by al-Rumi's Sufi ideas with which he became familiar through a married couple owning an American movie production company.

It must be pointed out that Sean's father, producer Oliver Stone, is a follower of the Jewish faith, whereas his mother follows the Christian Church.

Below is an interview which American CNN satellite television channel conducted with Sean showing the reasons why Sean embraced Islam:

#### **Tell us, Sean, what happened in that trip to Iran? What tempted you to embrace Islam?**

- Well, I would not call it temptation! The whole thing is that I agreed and accepted Muhammad as a Prophet just as I accepted other prophets. As you know, before I went to Iran, I was familiar with the practices of the Islamic faith. I read The Qur'an and studied Islam in both Oxford and Princeton universities alike, so I felt that Islam is an extension for the Jewish and Christian heritage. Muhammad is a Prophet just like Abraham and Jesus, peace with them; therefore, simply, why do we not make this public? I announced this publicly instead of keeping it a secret inside me. In fact, this is the only thing which now makes me a Muslim.

#### **So, I understand from you that your interest in converting to Islam started before you went to Iran?**

- For me to become a Muslim is not strange or unacceptable so I would be put on trial for it. I did not abandon Judaism or Christianity, and I still in my worship believe in the same God Whom I used to worship before, the One without a partner. My goal is to help the Americans and the West understand Islam. Hopefully, they will absorb the fact that Islam is not a facet of fascism. For example, Muhammad Ali, one of our boxing champions, was a Muslim. But now the situation has changed, and it is closer to phobia than to Islam. I feel that all beliefs must be recognized, just as is the case with Christianity and Judaism.

#### **So, you do not deny or substitute your being a Jew or a Christian with your new religion, Islam, yet you say that you**

**merged Islam into all of that? But let me ask you this: Conversion means leaving something in favor of something else, and the Holy Bible says specifically that you cannot serve two masters; so, how do you explain your conversion to Islam does not necessarily mean your abandonment and desertion of your parents' God? How do you answer that?**

- Well, as I said before, my conversion to Islam is through my acceptance of Muhammad as Prophet and Messenger, and Muhammad is the continuation of these messengers; so, we have to accept this. Saying so, we become Muslims, for Muhammad's faith is the continuation of the path which the followers of Judaism and of Christianity have undertaken. I always emphasize that I believe in one God Who is the same God of the Jews and of the Christians, and you choose how to worship that God. I, for example, have chosen to serve Him by prostrating to Him. You know that even in both Christian and Jewish religions, there are many sects and churches for the same faith.

It seems that Sean's conversion to Islam will be followed by the conversion of the famous Irish Catholic actor Liam John Neeson. It seems that this speeding wave of conversion to Islam in recent years comes as a result of the fierce image which Western news media tries to market about Muslims in the aftermath of the September 11 incidents and the successive wars on Iraq and Afghanistan.

Neeson had stated to the British Sun newspaper that during his visit to Turkey to shoot a film, the sound of the adhan five times in the day almost drove him insane, but as time passed by, his soul became at ease with that sound, causing in his depths a wonderful feeling, and he said that that feeling was absolutely the most beautiful.

So, will Liam catch up with Sean? Islam's gates are always open for everyone!

## **British Liza George Hutchinson: «Why I Accepted Islam?»**

### **• Please introduce yourself to our readers.**

- My name is **Liza George Hutchinson**, 23, born in London. I studied politics, economics, Spanish, English, and French at the Southbank University in London. I have been married to Isam Ahmed Fayed for five years.

### **When did you embrace the Islamic Faith?**

- Allah blessed me with guidance, so I accepted the religion of Islam in January of 1989 at the Islamic Center in Luzon (Switzerland) through the efforts of Brother Ka'bah and Swiss Sister Lubaba. The story started when I met some Lebanese folks in Geneva during my presence there. I used to work as a nanny. Isam was from Luzon, and he invited me to learn more about this religion because I wanted to know what Islam really is since the news media in my homeland used to depict Islam differently from its reality deliberately distorting its image. As far as I am concerned, I did not know about Muslims anything other than they do not drink wine and do not eat pork. What prompted me to go to Luzon was the brothers and sisters were very nice, and they demonstrated to me the true picture of Islam. In Luzon, Br. Ka'bah, who is in charge of the center there, talked to me, and I had many questions. I found with him the answers for them. I did not find anything in his talk and explanation which is rejected by sound reason. I did not find any illusion or lies in Islam, only legitimate facts based on sound reason. Two hours after the session, I accepted the Islamic faith and pronounced the two Shahadas.

### **How did your life continue after that?**

- After that, I started learning the science of religion from my husband, Isam. One of the Muslim sisters at the Islamic Center in Luzon used to send Shari'a-related lessons from time to time. Meanwhile, I had to leave Switzerland in order to study my university study in London. Through one of my husband's friends there, I was able to continue my study of the Islamic Shari'a. I studied there for about one year the essential religious sciences which are mandatory on every adult Muslim. Luckily, there is a prayer area for the Muslims at the university where I was studying, and we used to celebrate every Friday and during the days of the Month of *Ramadan*. British Muslim converts and Pakistanis used to participate with us in these celebrations. Then I moved to study in France.

### **Do you speak Arabic?**

- Unfortunately, I do not speak Arabic, but I have the desire to learn it Insha-Allah because it is the language of The Holy Qur'an and of the people of Paradise and the best of languages.

**How was your relationship with your family after embracing Islam?**

- I can describe my relationship with them as being good. I treat them well in an attempt to convince them to embrace Islam. This is what I hope for them, because Islam is the path to salvation.

**Tell us about the social life image in your homeland.**

- The social life in my homeland has two faces: an outside one, which we see in the beautiful things such as gardens, etc., and that everything is available for us... I mean if one sees these things, he wishes to spend all his lifetime in this country... But if we look at the inside, we do not see but disgusting things: There are drugs, adultery, AIDS and a huge tear-up in the family life. We see scattered family members. When a boy or a girl becomes 16, he/she leaves his/her family and does not visit them except on occasions; therefore, we read every day in newspapers about persons dying without anyone knowing whose sons they are; so the newspapers inquire about anyone who knows them so they may go to bury them, and this is disgusting.

In Islam, the matter is quite different: There are family ties, and this is something very beautiful and important, and we miss it in Europe.

**How is your relationship with the Muslims at the Islamic Center in Switzerland?**

- My relationship is very good; Praise to Allah. What I notice about them is that they stick to their religion and are cemented among themselves. They do whatever they can to help each other.

**What are your plans for the future?**

- Among the things for which I plan is to live permanently in Lebanon, Insha-Allah, because I am expecting a baby to be born to me soon. I have agreed with my husband, Isam, to return after a period of time to settle in Lebanon in order to teach our children. Many of my female Muslim friends have returned from Switzerland to Lebanon, and so has the family of my husband, Isam Fayed, in Beirut. I would like to live with them in order to feel the warmth of a family.



## Sister Asiya Abd Al-Zahir

### Why I Embraced Islam?

Islam has been described as being the religion of *Fitrah*, the innate nature of all humans. It is not surprising therefore when we discover that Islam is being accepted by millions of reverts around the world as the only pure way of life a person can follow. Statistics show that out of every 5 who revert to Islam, 4 are females. This blows away the false concept that Islam is a repressive religion for women. The following is an account of a sister who submitted to Allah as her Lord, took Islam as her religion, and Muhammad (s.a.w) as her Messenger.

I have always, since developing an ability to think deeply, believed in the existence of a single Creator, on whom everything that exists is dependent. Though my parents are Buddhist, from the age of 13, to this Creator, I have steadfastly prayed and yielded guidance from every day that I can remember. Yet, being schooled within a Christian environment, I naturally identified myself as a Christian. Sadly, my knowledge of Islam was minimal. I perceived it as a bizarre religion, limited to only a few underdeveloped nations, most of which were in the Middle East, and which endorsed an astoundingly suppressive lifestyle, particularly for women. Muslim women, I presumed, were considered inferior, a passive domestic slave, bashed often, and forced to compete among four for her husband's affections, which he could withhold from them all if he wanted to. The majority of these ideas I developed from hearsay, interactions with others I assumed knew what they were talking about, and a few documentaries on Iran and Saudi Arabia I watched on television.

As I entered university nearly three years ago, I came into contact with quite a number of Muslim students from various backgrounds. Strangely enough, even to myself, I was drawn to them and developed a curious inclination to learn and understand more about their religion. I observed how content they seemed and was very impressed by their openness and warmth towards myself and each other, but more importantly with their pride in belonging to a religion which holds many negative connotations.

I gradually became fascinated with Islam, and through a process of education, developed a greater respect for it than even my beloved Christianity. I was stunned at how wrong my previous conception had been and became particularly overwhelmed at the tremendous entitlements, equality, and acknowledgment Islam provided for women. I realized the reality of the Islamic lifestyle and the truth concerning that feeble American innovation termed «*Islamic fundamentalism*».

It is said that any person who possesses the faculty of reason and an open mind should recognize logic and truth when he/she encounters it, and so it was in my case.

More and more, literature, signs, and evidence were revealed to me, and more and more, my intellect was stimulated, and my heart warmed. I wanted to know everything about Islam and felt already a sense of brotherhood with and belonging among its followers.

What impressed me the most was how practical Islam is - how it encompasses a rule and a lesson for almost every facet of living. And by the sheer grace of God, I at last understood the faults of the Christian theology and of the concepts I had previously accepted unquestioningly. At midday, on August 4th, 1994, before over 20 witnesses, I recited the *shahadah* and became an official Muslim.

I shall never forget the bliss of that day and how much my life has turned around in only a year's time.

I have often been asked what it is like to be a revert and of the difficulties I must endure. Though I do not wish to dwell on this topic, as pity is not my priority, I shall give some examples of what I have been through.

The period up till the end of *Ramadan* was, by far, the hardest to get through.

Family disputes took place almost daily; I was showered with verbal abuse, ridicule, and threats. On many occasions, my room was physically torn apart, books mysteriously disappeared, and slanderous phone messages were sent to my friends and their parents.

There have been times I have been locked out of home and forced to abstain from dinner as pork was deliberately served. Even to this day, all my mail is opened before I have the chance to do so myself. Apart from my housing and meals, I must provide for myself financially. My readings, as my conversations over the phone, are done in privacy. My writings and my visits to mosques or other Islamic venues must always be concealed. I am similarly not able to visit friends very often as I may be «brain-washed» even more.

I cannot perform my prayers until I am sure no one is around. Nor can I express my excitement and celebration during *Ramadan*. I cannot share the joy at knowing yet another sister has put on *Hijab*, nor can I discuss the lesson I have learned this day or the speech given by an Islamic scholar/scientist. Moreover, I must continually defend the Muslims and the Islam portrayed on the media and fight against the stereotypes my parents stubbornly maintain.

To see their expressions of disgust at myself is almost unbearable. I am now insecure as to my parents' affections and constantly worry of how much I am hurting them. Through the entire Month of *Ramadan*, my mother spoke to me not once. I had to hear her say time and time again at how I had betrayed the family. My pleading with her otherwise was to no avail. I am told over and over again that what I have done is unforgivable, and if any of our relations or already few friends knew, my parents would surely be outcasts.

However, I do not claim to have a miserable life. I am more content and at peace now than I ever have been. My purpose in relating all of this is to try to display the opportunities that many of you have which are so often taken for granted, so little taken advantage of, but so precious to many reverts like myself. To reflect on these hardships alone would imply I have gained nothing by becoming a Muslim other than pain. On the contrary, Islam has given me already so many vast rewards; I shiver to think of how much more wonderful the gifts of Paradise would be.

At the time of my reversion, although I had accepted Islam as being true, I had no idea of the vast internal changes it would incur upon me. Even I am astounded at how much I devour knowledge, how Islam is in my thoughts every waking moment, how compelling I feel my responsibility is to the Ummah, and how much more of a Muslim I became every month.

It is as if one's life in Islam progresses and spreads to encompass and govern every cellular and spiritual dimension in oneself.

Abu Huraira (r.a.a.) narrated that: Allah's Messenger (s.a.w) once said: «Allah said: '... and My slave keeps coming closer to Me... then I become his sense of hearing with which he hears, and his sense of sight with which he sees, and his hand with which he grasps, and his legs with which he walks ... ' «[Sahih Al-Bukhari]. This is precisely my experience.

Remarkably, from one religion, I have gained a profound insight into the operations of human behavior and sociology, as well as geophysics and astronomy. As I mature, it becomes clearer and clearer to me that again and again, it is Islam that has already answered the social and economic dilemmas of our time.

Over the past year, I have developed quite an extensive breadth of Islamic knowledge and have studied ayahs of The Holy Qur'an in much finer detail. Not once have I come across anything which would make me doubt, for even one minute, the authenticity of The Qur'an and the relevance of Islam for contemporary society. This has been the only religion I have ever been completely sure of and am surer of each day that I serve.

Furthermore, I have established my identity, I am more confident of myself; a stronger woman and person of color, I am more aware of my existence and more secure in my battles.

If I have achieved anything through this article, my hope is that it is that I have depicted the greatness and mercy of our Glorious Sovereign, who makes all things possible. Allah (s.w.t.) says: {***He guides there with whom He pleases***}. [S.393, V.23] Truly, I have been blessed to be one of those who have personally received the light and whose heart has been ordained to accept it.

## Famous French Singer

**‘Diam’s - Melanie Georgiades’** embraces Islam, and wears *Hijab*

**Famous French singer Diam’s has announced in a newly-published autobiography that she has embraced Islam and decided to wear hijab. Amid a nationwide debate in France surrounding attitudes towards the Islamic veil, or Hijab, a French rapper, has surprised fans by announcing her conversion to Islam and choosing to wear a headscarf.**

Mélanie Georgiades, known as Diam’s, has gone through what onlookers have described as a «*complete transformation*» from an image she had prior to 2009.

Since 2009, Diam’s had been unusually absent from the mainstream rap scene, prompting more than three years of controversy over her whereabouts, despite making the odd public appearance with her scarf.

The book tells about Diam’s life, hardships, conversion to Islam, and choosing to wear *Hijab*.

*«In the height of success, I suffered from a major depression and visited different psychologists, but none of them could help me,»* she says in her book.

Diam’s, whose real name is Mélanie Georgiades, said she found that the way out of depression was in saying prayers and reading The Qur’an.

The 32-year-old artist said she embraced Islam during a visit to the Mauritius Island in 2008, when she also decided to wear *Hijab* and open a center to support orphans.

But recently the French rapper made her first television appearance with her new image.

Diam’s appeared in an exclusive TV interview with French TV station TF1 to talk about a past experience with drugs, including hallucinating narcotics and being in a mental asylum until she discovered the «*serenity of Islam.*» The rapper said the religion was introduced to her by coincidence, when she saw a Muslim friend praying.

Diam’s said she has been married for over a year and is now a new mother, moving far away from her drug-related past.

In her TV interview, she said her «*conversion to Islam was the result of a personal conviction, after understanding the religion and reading The Holy Quran.*»

When asked about wearing the *Hijab* in France, a country which has banned the Niqab, she said: *«I believe that I live in a tolerant society, and I don’t feel hurt by criticism, but by insults and stereotyping and ready-made judgments.»*

Asked by her host about why she is wearing a *Hijab* while many Muslim women don’t wear it and don’t find it to be a religious obligation, she answered: *«I see it as a divine order or a divine advice, this brings joy to my heart, and for me this is enough.»*

## Stardom?

Diam’s said that by converting to Islam she gained comfort, adding that stardom doesn’t fit in with her life anymore, adding *«This has warmed my heart, as I know now the purpose of my existence, and why am I here on Earth.»*

Discussing how her life was like before her conversion to Islam, Diam's said: *«I was very famous, and I had what every famous person looks for, but I was always crying bitterly alone at home, and this is what none of my fans had felt.»*

She added: *«I was heavily addicted to drugs, including hallucinating narcotics and was admitted to mental asylum to recover, but this was in vain until I heard one of my Muslim friends saying 'I am going to pray for a while and will come back,' so I told her that I want to pray as well.»*

Recalling that moment, Diam's said: *«It was the first time that I touched the floor with head, and I had a strong feeling that I have never experienced before, and I believe now that kneeling in prayer shouldn't be done to anyone but Allah.»*

### **Islam, a religion of tolerance**

Diam's said that she moved to Mauritius to read The Quran and have a better understanding of Islam, discovering during her retreat the tolerance of Islam.

When asked by her host about her views on Islam and those who commit all the murders and atrocities pretending to be doing it in the name of religion, she answered: *«I think we should differentiate between the ignorant and the knowledgeable, and the ignorant should not speak about what he doesn't know; Islam does not allow murdering innocent victims the way we see it nowadays.»*

## **Rabbi of Makhachkala synagogue embraced Islam**

- Every person has a different way of coming to the Truth. For Moisha Krivitsky, this way led through a faculty of law and a synagogue. The lawyer-to-be becomes a Rabbi, and then he converts into Islam and finds himself in prison.

- Today Musa (this is the name he has adopted when he became a Muslim) lives in a small mosque in Al-Burikent, a mountain area of Makhachkala and works as a watchman in the Central Juma Mosque.

### **Musa, tell us, did you find the way easily?**

- With great difficulty. It was hard then, and it isn't much easier now. When you go deeply into Islam and its inner meaning, you understand that this religion is very simple, but the way that leads to it may be extremely difficult. Often, people don't understand how a person could be converted into Islam from the other side, as it were. But there are no other sides here: Islam is everything there is, both what we imagine and what we don't imagine.

### **Musa, as a matter of fact, we were given this fact as a certain sensation: a Rabbi has turned Muslim.**

- Well, it has been no sensation for quite a long while already; it's more than a year that I did this. It was strange for me at first, too. But it wasn't an off-the-cuff decision. When I came into Islam, I had read books about it; I had been interested.

### **Did you finish any high school before coming to the synagogue?**

- Yes, I finished a clerical high school. After graduation, I came to Makhachkala and became the local Rabbi.

### **And where did you come from?**

- Oh, from far away. But I've already become a true Dagestan, I've got a lot of friends here - both among Muslims and people who are far from Islam.

### **Let's return to your work in the synagogue.**

- It was quite a paradoxical situation: there was a mosque near my synagogue, the town mosque. Sometimes my friends who were its parishioners would come to me - just to chat. I sometimes would come to the mosque myself, to see how the services were carried out. I was very interested. So we lived like good neighbors. And once, during *Ramadan*, a woman came to me - as I now understand, she belonged to a people that were historically Muslim - and she asked me to comment the Russian translation of The Quran made by Krachovsky.

### **She brought the Quran to you - a Rabbi?!**

- Yes, and she asked me to give her the Torah to read in return. So I tried to read The Quran - about ten times. It was really hard, but gradually I began to understand and to get a basic notion of Islam. That woman had brought back the Torah. It turned out to be very difficult for her to read and

understand because religious literature requires extreme concentration and attention.

**Musa, and when you were reading the translation, you must have begun to compare it with the Torah?**

- I had found answers to too many questions in The Quran. Not to all of them, of course, because it wasn't the Arabic original, but the translation. But I had begun to understand things.

**Does it mean that you couldn't find some answers in Judaism?**

- I don't know; there's Allah's will in everything. Apparently, those Jews who became Muslims in the times of the Prophet (P.B.U.H) couldn't find some answers in Judaism but found them in Islam. Perhaps, they were attracted by the personality of the Prophet (P.B.U.H), his behavior, and his way of communicating with people. It's an important topic.

What exactly were the questions that you couldn't find answers to in Judaism?

- Before I came into contact with Islam, there were questions which I had never even tried to find answers to. Probably, an important part here had been played by comparing The Quran and The Bible. There is a key phrase, well-known to those who are familiar with religious issues: «*Follow the Prophet who is yet to cometh*». And when I studied Islam, I understood that the Prophet Muhammad (P.B.U.H) is the very Prophet to be followed. Both the Bible and the Torah tell us to do it. I haven't invented anything here.

**And what does the Torah say about the Prophet (P.B.U.H)?**

- We won't be able to find his name in the Torah. But we can figure it out using a special key. For example, we can understand what god this or that particular person in history worships. The formula describing the last Prophet (P.B.U.H) is that he would worship One God, the Sole Creator of the world. The Prophet Muhammad (P.B.U.H) matches this description exactly. When I read this, I got very interested. I hadn't known anything about Islam before that. Then I decided to look deeper into the matter and see whether there were any miracles and signs connected with the name of the Prophet (P.B.U.H). The Bible tells us that the Lord sends miracles to the prophets to confirm their special mission in people's eyes. I asked the Alims about this, and they said: Here is a collection of true *Hadiths* which describe the miracles connected with the Prophet (P.B.U.H). Then I read that the Prophet (P.B.U.H) had always said that there had been prophets and messengers before him; we can find their names both in the Torah and in the Bible. When I was only starting to get interested, it sounded somewhat strange for me. Well, my own actions led to what happened to me. Sometimes I get to thinking: why did I read all this? Perhaps, I should say the Tawba (a prayer of repenting) right now for having thoughts like that.



**Should I understand you, Musa, that you now feel a great responsibility for becoming a Muslim, or do you have some other feelings?**

- Yes, responsibility, but something else as well. I can't put my finger on it now. When a person knows Islam well, he's got both his feet firmly on the ground. Islam helps a person. I would be insincere if I said that all the Dagestan are such knowing Muslims. We sometimes talk about it in the mosque, and I like to say that there are not so many real Muslims in Dagestan - only the ustaths (learned theologians) and their students, and the rest of us are just candidates. I can't say that we do what the Sunna requires; we are only trying to; and when we don't do what we should, we try to invent some clever excuses. These efforts should have better been applied to doing our duty. It's hard for me to watch this. Sometimes I'm distracted by what is happening around me, as well. I haven't got strength enough to fight this, and the weakness of my nature shows clearly here. I can't say I'm totally helpless, but I have no right to say that I've achieved anything in Islam. I've only got torments. When I understood that I had to become a Muslim, I thought that Islam was a single whole - one common road or a huge indivisible ocean. Then I saw that there were a lot of trends in Islam, and new questions appeared. All these trends are like whirl pools; they whirl and whirl... It's very hard! If a person tells you: Look, we fulfill all the *Hadiths*. We only understand The Quran correctly. Then you follow this person, because you think that he speaks true things, and because you want to please Allah. But then, after a couple of months, you understand that these claims were false. Allah controls us. And you think: if this way is the right way, then why is there something that goes the wrong way? I hope to get the right answers soon.

At this moment, our conversation was interrupted by a stunningly beautiful azan. People started arriving to the mosque. We rose and hastened for the prayer, too.

## From MTV to Mecca

**Kristiane Backer uses her life story to tell the world about Islam. It is not every day that you hear of a former MTV presenter writing a book on Islam. «From MTV to Mecca: How Islam Inspired My Life» is a riveting account of how Kristiane Backer went from being one of the most recognized faces on MTV Europe to converting to Islam after meeting with Pakistani cricketing legend (now turned politician) Imran Khan.**

*«I wrote this book because I have been a victim of Islamophobia,» she tells Weekend Review. «The Islam I read about in the media on a daily basis is not the Islam I converted to and the Islam my teachers taught me. It is such a wide gap that I wrote the book to take people by the hand and show them how I discovered Islam and how I overcame these prejudices. I want to show the true values of Islam.»*

Backer joined MTV Europe in 1989 as one of its first VJs. In the years that followed, her stardom rocketed as she presented shows such as *«The Coca Cola Report»*, *«European Top 20»* and *«MTV at the Movies»*. In 1992, alongside working for MTV, she also landed herself a youth show on German National television, Bravo TV.

Yet, even though she had everything a young person could dream of, Backer felt something was lacking. She was fed up of having to constantly perform - one show chasing the next - and then being home alone again. *«I thought what I was missing was love for a man,» she says. «But then I realized that the inner void I'd felt could only be filled by Allah - not by a human being. Because people come and go - love happens, then it disappears again, and then what? Only one love is forever and eternal and that is the love for God. There came a point when I experienced a personal crisis. I was so stressed out from all the pressure that I was ready to go: ready to die, basically- I felt that depressed. As I was rushing to a show I was supposed to host in Belgium, I thought if the [aircraft] crashed it didn't matter. Who cares? No joy here. Shortly after came a turning point in her life. In 1992, she met Imran Khan at a friend's dinner, and they began to see each other frequently. Khan incidentally at that time was finding his own faith. He was reading a lot of books about Islam and enthusiastically started sharing everything with her. «I was somehow receptive to that because I had always had an interest in philosophy, ethics and religion in school,» she says. «He talked to me about God, our purpose in life, and a higher goal to look at.»*

One of the books she read, which deeply influenced her, was *«The Road to Mecca»*, by Mohammad Asad, formerly a Jewish journalist who famously converted to Islam in Berlin in 1926 after travelling the Arabian lands. *«He described the beautiful noble Arab soul so eloquently before the arrival of oil,» Backer says. «That was when he was there in the Arabian Peninsula, hanging out with the Bedouin. He describes beautifully how you could travel throughout the whole Arabia and never pay a penny as the people were so hospitable. He observes the striking contrast between the warmth of the Arabian people he encountered in the desert and the miserable and stressed passengers of the Berlin tube. When Asad came home, he opened The Quran and read, 'You are obsessed by greed for more*

*and more, until you go down to your graves' and he thought this was the answer to what he had seen on the tube.»* Backer's own encounters with Muslims had some strange parallels to Asad's.

Khan invited Backer to travel to the northern regions of Pakistan. Backer was impressed by the hospitality of the village people she met who were living with so little.

*«We passed many poor people who had a light in their eyes,»* she says. *«When I returned I had an experience similar to Mohammad Asad's. You realize people are miserable because they can't get the latest Prada handbag that has sold out. Or they haven't got the right VIP all-access pass. I was commuting between two worlds. I saw for myself the difference between attitudes. OK, I will give you an example.»*

She recounts her experience on the flight back from Pakistan. Backer was sitting next to a Pakistani man, and they began chatting. *«At the airport in London, a whole tribe was waiting for him,»* she laughs, *«And he noticed I was alone. So he suggested he and some of his family members take me home first. This delayed the family visit by an hour or so. Unbelievable, I didn't even know these people.»*

Shortly afterwards Backer went to Germany to participate in a major TV event. *«The boss of my TV station asked my producers who were then driving back to the hotel if he could get a lift,»* she says. *«In the car, they debated among themselves briefly and concluded time is money - that would be a ten-minute detour, so no, they couldn't give a lift.»* But it wasn't just these contrasting experiences which drew her to Islam. For Backer the attraction to the religion was on different levels. *«I saw so many people on the team of Imran Khan's cancer hospital,»* she says. *«They all donated their time, money, and effort just to help build this hospital for the people of Pakistan, where the poor would be treated free of charge. Pakistan never had a cancer hospital, or indeed a health - care system - it was sad. Imran built the first cancer hospital there with an army of volunteers, and I was really touched by that. When I travelled through the Karakorum Mountains, I saw very poor people who lived in little mud houses and slept above their animals so that the heat rose and kept them warm. It was heartbreaking - I'd never seen anything like it. Yet, what touched me was their generosity. When we got out of our jeep and visited the villages, the people offered us whatever they had - almonds, apricots, walnuts - with a 'Bismillah', 'in the name of God'.»*

However inspired she may have been by the simple Muslim people she encountered, her interest in Islam ended up costing Backer her job. In 1995, she was celebrating the 100th episode of her show on Bravo TV. One journalist had done his research really well and asked if she had already converted for her friend. *«I said no, but that I was a Muslim at heart. I had still not converted at that time. This little remark practically ended my career. A negative media campaign followed. The press accused me of having lost the plot, presenting my youth show from behind the burqa or supporting terrorism. On top of all that, a week later, I lost my youth show. It all happened at the same time. Unbelievable.»*

Prior to the press demonization, there hadn't been any problems with Bravo TV. *«What can I say?»* she says. *«The contract was just signed. Then they pretended the contract didn't exist. It practically finished my career.»*

Backer credits her faith for pulling her through all her professional difficulties. *«I lost everything at the same time,»* she says, *«my job, my relationship. But I had gained my faith, the most precious gift of all. I was going to a certain mosque where there were a lot of spiritual people, Sufis. They helped me see these difficulties from a higher perspective and understand that there is some good even in suffering. If God loves you, He afflicts you, a Hadith says. And who experienced the most difficulties? The prophets. So I suppose anybody going through a difficult time is a good sign, God loves you.»*

Backer believes there is a message in the book for people caught up in today's materialistic lifestyle. *«A lot of young people want MTV, entertainment, culture,»* she says. *«I had all that, and I can tell you it doesn't bring lasting happiness. I would never want my old life back. That emptiness I felt before I converted is now filled with meaning. I have a focus, a purpose in my life, and that constant connection with God - an anchor in heaven.»*

She also makes a distinction between religious practices and the culture, which people often mix up. *«For a European, converting to Islam doesn't mean wearing the abaya in London,»* she says. *«The abaya is a cultural custom. We can wear our modest European clothes, pray, give charity and abstain from alcohol - adhere to the principles but not necessarily take on other cultural traits. I don't need to wear a shalwar kameez or an abaya, although I have a few of each and enjoy wearing them when suitable. But normally, in the West, I wear my European clothes. Basically I try to practice Islam with my European understanding of things.»* Backer feels certain essential values which can be characterized as European, such as a respect for human rights and concern for the environment, are also Islamic values. Yet these are missing in a lot of Muslim - majority countries. *«Mohammad Asad, in the last century, said you find a lot of Islam in Europe but few Muslims, yet you find a lot of Muslims in the East but very little true Islam,»* she says.

Being a convert to Islam has its challenges, acknowledges Backer, particularly with regard to finding a like-minded social circle. Even more of a struggle for converts can be to locate a suitable marriage partner, as many are stuck between two worlds. Backer herself is divorced and finds life at times can get a bit lonely. *«Muslims are so keen on converting people to Islam,»* she says. *«But I always say, what about the aftercare? That is when the real work starts. Don't just think about converting someone and then leaving them to their own devices. I am fortunate to have developed a good network of friends in faith by now. Thank God. But how many Eids have I not celebrated because I am on my own? And every Eid it is the same, going to the mosque, and then it is business as usual for me, unfortunately. Unless I am really lucky and someone invites me, but it doesn't always happen.»*

However, she is not alone in this experience. *«Often, on Eid, I end up having dinner with one convert friend who also doesn't have a Muslim*

*family,» she says. «And on Christmas, we are both not really welcome among our own families anymore because they think we have chosen something else. It's the same in Ramadan. I don't have anyone to share sahoor with in the morning or break my fast with - except of course when invited for iftar. A degree of isolation is a part of being a convert or reverts, although, of course, we are now always in the best company of all - God. And it is the faith that pulls us through any challenge, although I have heard of a number of new Muslims who gave up again because of a lack of support from the Muslim community. Only yesterday, I met a lady who was a practicing Muslim for ten years or so and then later became a Christian minister.»*

Backer keeps busy with efforts to improve the public image of Islam in Britain. She was one of the names behind an *«Inspired by [Prophet] Mohammad [PBUH]»* campaign in London that aimed to present a positive message of the religion by displaying adverts at bus stops, tube stations, and cabs. Her picture was featured on the posters with the words, *«I believe in protecting the environment, so did ([Prophet] Mohammad [PBUH]).»* The campaign was positively received in the media. More recently, she was interviewed by the BBC to talk about the controversy surrounding the anti-Islam film *«Innocence of Muslims»*.

One of her concerns remains that a majority of people in the United Kingdom draw their knowledge about Islam from what the media tells them. *«People don't go into Islamic bookshops and buy books by Gai Eaton or other scholars,»* she says, *«They just read the Daily Mail or watch TV and then form their opinion on Islam. I believe it's all about education. That is why I usually do all these interviews. When The Sun calls, a lot of people say, 'Oh, I don't want to speak to The Sun.' I do it because even if I could just get a drop of the truth into that ocean it could have a ripple effect.*

## **Brother Yahya: Best way to live and die** (Yahya) Donald W. Flood

### **The Qur'an: The Last Revelation**

I comprehended that it was found imperative due to innovations attributed to Divine revelation that the need arose for another Prophet after Eesa (A.S.) with another revelation after the Gospel. This is why Allah sent Muhammad (P.B.U.H) with the last Message, (i.e., The Qur'an), to bring all of mankind back to the belief in and worship of One Allah, without partners or intermediaries. According to Muslims, The Holy Qur'an, the permanent ultimate source of guidance for mankind, offers a rational and historical elucidation of the magnificent role of Eesa (A.S.). The name Eesa (A.S.) is cited twenty-five times in The Qur'an, which contains a chapter called Maryam (Mary), named after the mother of Eesa (alaihissalam). Regarding the Divine authenticity of this revelation, I found the following Quranic verses very compelling: *«And it was not [possible] for this Qur'an to be produced by other than Allah, but [it is] a confirmation of what was before it and a detailed explanation of the [former] Scripture, about which there is no doubt, from the Lord of the Worlds.»* (10:37) and *«And indeed, it is the truth of certainty.»* (69:51) Similarly, I was concerned about the adulteration of The Qur'an since this was a major problem with the previous revelations. I read that The Qur'an will never change or be abrogated: *«Indeed, it is We who sent down the message [i.e., the Qur'an], and indeed, We will be its guardian.»* (15:9) I was also informed about some of the scientific phenomena mentioned in The Qur'an, which give credence to the belief that The Qur'an is the literal word of Allah. There are verses describing human embryonic development, mountains, the origin of the universe, the cerebrum, seas, deep seas, and internal waves and clouds. It is beyond explanation that anyone, more than fourteen hundred years ago, could have known the facts, which were found or confirmed recently by advanced mechanisms and sophisticated scientific procedures.

### **Islam: The Essence and Culmination of Revealed Religions**

Muslims believe that the essential purpose for which mankind was created is the worship of Allah. As He said in The Qur'an, *«And I did not create the jinn [i.e., a type of creation, created by Allah from fire] and mankind except to worship Me»* (51:56) Related to this, a well known Islamic scholar from the West says, *«The most complete system of worship available to humans today is the system found in the religion of Islam. The very name 'Islam' means 'submission to the Will of Allah'. Although it is commonly referred to as 'the third of the three monotheistic faiths, it is not a new religion at all. It is the religion brought by all the Prophets of Allah for humankind. Islam was the religion of Adam, Abraham, Moses and Jesus.»* In addition he states, *«Since there is only One Allah, and humankind is one species, the religion that Allah has ordained for humans is [essentially] one... Human spiritual and social needs are uniform, and human nature has not changed since the first man and woman were created.*

*Uncovering the fact that the message of Allah has always been the same, I realized it is the duty of all human beings to seek the truth and not just*



*blindly accept the religion that their society or parents follow. According to The Qur'an, «You worship besides Him not except [mere] names you have named, you and your fathers, for which Allah has sent down no authority...» (12:40). Regarding Fitrah [i.e., the inherent nature of man to worship Allah prior to the corruption of his nature by external influences], Prophet Muhammad (P.B.U.H) said, «Every child is born on Al-Fitrah, and his parents convert him to Judaism or Christianity or Magianism. As an animal delivers a perfect baby animal, do you find it mutilated?» Furthermore, Allah says, «so direct your face [i.e., self] toward the religion, inclining toward truth. [Adhere to] the Fitrah of Allah upon which He has created [all] people. No change should there be in the creation of Allah. That is the correct religion, but most of the people do not know.» (30:30) Moreover, I learned there is no other religion acceptable to Allah besides Islam, as He clearly states in The Qur'an: «And whoever desires other than Islam as a religion, never will it be accepted from him, and he, in the Hereafter, will be among the losers.» (3:85). I deduced that man might neglect the guidance of Allah and establish his own standards of living. Ultimately, however, he will discover it is only a mirage that deluded him.*

### **A Traveler**

As I continued to read The Qur'an and learn about the sayings and doings of Prophet Muhammad (P.B.U.H), I noticed Islam views man as a traveler in this life, and the 'Home' is in the next life for eternity. We are here for a short period, and we cannot take anything with us from this life except our belief in Allah and our deeds. Thus, man should be like a traveler who passes through the land and does not become attached to it. As travelers on this journey, we must understand that the meaning of being alive is to be tested. Hence, there is suffering, joy, pain, and elation. These tests of good and evil are intended to evoke our higher spiritual qualities. Yet, we are incapable of benefiting from these tests unless we do our best, have complete trust in Allah, and patiently accept what He has destined for us.

### **The Road to Paradise**

It was very meaningful to learn about Paradise since this must certainly be the ultimate goal of every individual. Regarding this eternal home, Allah says, «And no soul knows what has been hidden for it of comfort for eyes [i.e., satisfaction] as a reward for what it used to do.» (32:17) I also became aware of a pleasure that is beyond all imagination, which is to be in the Presence of the Creator Himself. I wondered who the souls worthy of such a reward are. This reward of Paradise is too great to have a price. I was told the price is true faith, which is proven by obedience to Allah and following the Sunnah (way) of Prophet Muhammad (P.B.U.H). I grasped that mankind must worship Allah to attain righteousness and the spiritual status necessary to enter Paradise. This means human beings have to comprehend that worship is as indispensable as eating and breathing and not a favor they are doing for Allah. Likewise, I found out that we need to read The Qur'an to find out what kind of people Allah wants us to be and then try to become as such. This is the road to Paradise.



### Overcoming an Obstacle

At this point, I felt about 80% sure I wanted to become a Muslim, but something was holding me back. I was concerned about the reaction of my family and friends if they knew that I had become a Muslim. Shortly thereafter, I expressed this concern to a Muslim who told me that on Judgment Day, no one will be able to help you, not your father, mother nor any of your friends. Therefore, if you believe Islam is the true religion, you should embrace it and live your life to please the One Who created you. Thus, it became very lucid to me that we are all in the same boat; every soul shall taste death, and then we'll be liable for our particular belief in Allah and for our deeds.

### A Meaningful Videotape

By this stage in my search for the truth, I was on the verge of embracing Islam. I watched an Islamic lecture on videotape about the purpose of life. The main theme of this lecture was that the purpose of life may be summed up in one word, i.e., Islam (peaceful submission to the Will of Allah). An additional point was that, unlike other religions or beliefs, the term 'Islam' is not associated with any particular person or place. Allah has named the religion in the following Quranic verse: *«Indeed, the Religion in the sight of Allah is Islam...»* (3:19) Anyone who embraces Islam is called Muslim regardless of that person's race, sex or nationality. This is one of the reasons why Islam is a universal religion. Prior to my search for the truth, I had never seriously considered Islam as an option because of the constant negative portrayal of Muslims in the media. Similarly, it was disclosed in this videotape that although Islam is characterized by high moral standards, not all Muslims uphold these standards. I learned the same can be said about adherents of other religions. I finally understood that we cannot judge a religion by the actions of its followers alone, as I had done, because all humans are fallible. On that account, we should not judge Islam by the actions of its proponents, but by its revelation (The Holy Qur'an) and the Sunnah of Prophet Muhammad (P.B.U.H). The last point I picked up from this lecture concerned the importance of gratitude. Allah mentions in The Qur'an that we should be grateful for the fact that He created us: *«And Allah has extracted you from the wombs of your mothers not knowing a thing, and He made for you hearing and vision and hearts [i.e., intellect] that perhaps you would be grateful.»* (16:78) Allah Almighty has also cited gratitude along with belief and has made it clear that He gains nothing from punishing His people when they give thanks to Him and believe in Him. He says in The Qur'an, *«What would Allah do with [i.e., gain from] your punishment if you are grateful and believe? ...»* (4:147)

### The Truth Unveils Itself

As soon as the videotape had finished, I experienced the truth being unveiled to my spirit. I felt a huge burden of sins flying off my back. Moreover, it felt like my soul was rising above the earth, refusing the makeshift delights of this world in favor of the eternal joys of the Hereafter. This experience, coupled with the long process of reasoning, solved the 'purpose of life puzzle'. It revealed Islam as the truth, thereby replenishing

my 'spiritual landscape' with belief, purpose, direction, and action. I, therefore, entered the gate of Islam by saying the declaration of faith required to become a Muslim: Ashhadu an la ilaha illa Allah wa ashhadu anna Muhammadan Rasool Allah. (I bear witness that there is no God but Allah and Muhammad is His Messenger). I was informed that this formal testimony confirms one's belief in all the Prophets and Messengers of Allah, along with all of His Divine revelations in their original form, thereby updating and completing one's religion to the last of the Prophets [Muhammad (P.B.U.H)] and to the final revelation of Allah [The Qur'an]. The following point became overwhelmingly clear to me: Had Eesa (A.S.) been the last Prophet of Allah and had the Gospel been the final book of revelation, I would have attested to that. As a result, I have naturally chosen to follow the final revelation from the Creator as exemplified by the Seal of the Prophets (P.B.U.H).

### **Impressions of a New Muslim**

During my search to find the truth, the lesson, which, transcended all lessons, was that all objects of worship other than Allah are mere delusions. To anyone who sees this clearly, the only possible course is to bring one's own will and actions into complete unison with that of Allah. Acquiescing to the Will of Allah has enabled me to feel peace with the Creator, with others, and finally, with myself. Consequently, I feel very grateful, that by the Mercy of Allah, I have been rescued from the depths of ignorance and have stepped into the light of truth. Islam, the true religion of all times, places, and peoples, is a complete code of life which guides man to fulfill the purpose of his existence on earth and prepares him for the Day when he will return to his Creator. Following this path in a devout manner enables one to gain the pleasure of Allah and be closer to Him amid the endless delights of Paradise while escaping from the punishment of Hellfire. Another bonus is that our present life will be much happier when we make such a choice.

### **A Deceptive Enjoyment**

Embracing Islam has given me more of an insight into the illusive nature of this life. For instance, one basic object of Islam is the liberation of man. This is why a Muslim calls himself 'Abdullah', the slave or servant of Allah, because enslavement to Allah signifies liberation from all other forms of servitude, and although modern man may think that he is liberated, he is in fact a slave to his desires. He is generally deceived by this worldly life. He is 'addicted' to hoarding wealth, sex, violence, intoxicants, etc. But above all, he is often seduced by the capitalist system that tends to work through the invention of false needs, which he feels must be satisfied instantly. As Allah says in the Qur'an, *«Have you seen the one who takes as his god his own desire? Then would you be responsible for him? Or do you think that most of them hear or reason? They are not except as cattle. Rather, they are [even] more astray in [their] way.»* (25: 43-44) Correspondingly, we should not let our zeal to enjoy the pleasures of this fleeting life and jeopardize our opportunity to enjoy the ecstasy of Paradise. As Allah says in The Qur'an, *«Beautiful for people is the love of that which*

*they desire - of women and sons, heaped-up sums of gold and silver, fine branded horses, and cattle and tilled land. That is the enjoyment of worldly life, but Allah has with Him the best return [i.e. Paradise]. Say, «Shall I inform you of something better than that? For those who fear Allah will be in gardens in the presence of their Lord beneath which rivers flow, wherein they abide eternally, and purified spouses and approval from Allah...»* (3:14-15) Therefore, the real competition in this life is not the accumulation of wealth or the desire for fame; it is competing with one another to perform good deeds to please Allah, while having our lawful portion of enjoyment in this life.

### **The Right Path to Allah**

There are many religious alternatives available to man, and it is up to him to choose the one he wishes to follow. He is like a merchant with many goods in front of him, and it is his choice which one to trade in. He will obviously select the one he thinks will be the most lucrative. However, the merchant is unsure and has no guarantee of prosperity; his product may have a market and he may make handsome returns, but he could just as easily lose all of his money. In contrast, the believer in the Oneness of Allah who submits to His Will (a Muslim), is completely sure that if he follows the path of guidance [the Qur'an and the Sunnah of Prophet Muhammad (P.B.U.H)], there will undoubtedly be success and reward waiting for him at the end of this path. Fortunately, this success also starts at the beginning of the path.

### **Epilogue**

Based on my search for the truth, I concluded that the precise way we believe in Allah and the deeds we perform determine our future condition for eternity. Our Creator is giving us all an equal chance, regardless of our circumstances, to earn His pleasure in preparation for Judgment Day, as in the following Quranic verses: *«And obey Allah and His Messenger that you may obtain mercy. And hasten to forgiveness from your Lord and a garden [i.e., Paradise] as wide as the Heavens and earth, prepared for the righteous.»* (3:132-133) If we sincerely seek the truth of this life, which is Islam (peaceful submission to the Will (of Allah), Allah will guide us there, Insha Allah. He directs us to examine the life and the Sunnah of Prophet Muhammad (P.B.U.H), as he represents the best role model for mankind to follow. Furthermore, Allah directs us to investigate and ponder what He says in The Qur'an. One will see that The Qur'an is indeed like a persistent and strong knocking on a door, or loud shouts seeking to awaken those who are fast asleep because they are just completely absorbed by this life on earth. The knocks and shouts appear one after the other: Wake up! Look around you! Think! Reflect! Allah is there! There is planning, trial, accountability, reckoning, reward, severe punishment, and lasting bliss! Clearly and unequivocally, the best way to live and die in this world is as a righteous Muslim! When one comes to the conclusion that Islam is the truth, he should not delay in becoming a Muslim because he may die first, and then it will be too late; A few months after embracing Islam, I found two verses in The Qur'an that mirror what the American Muslim told me

regarding how we should live and die: «*And Ibrahim (alaihissalam) instructed his sons and [so did] Yaqoob (alaihissalam), [saying], O my sons! Indeed Allah has chosen for you this religion, so do not die except while you are Muslims.*» (2:132) And O you who have believed, fear Allah as He should be feared and do not die except as Muslims [in submission to Him].» (3:102).

## **I'm a new Muslim**

### **Ruqaiyyah Waris Maqsood**

There is nothing easier than converting to Islam: The moment one really becomes aware personally that God is real and truly does exist and accepts that the Arab Muhammad (peace be upon him) really was the last Prophet of God as all the others named in the Bible, one has actually taken the first step.

This moment of dawning is called *taqwa* (God-consciousness), and *ihsan* - awareness. Suddenly you know that God can see you and knows you, even if you do not know or see Him.

The next step in becoming a Muslim is to make a clear statement of this moment of faith, to declare *shahadah*: 'I bear witness'. Then follows the rest of your life.

### **Living as a Muslim**

It is one thing to become a Muslim in the mind, but it's quite another to enter into the lifestyle or to become part of the local Muslim community.

For many female converts, this involves a great deal of determination and confidence building. Not only do you have to face your own family and friends who think you have gone mad, but as a woman you have to find the courage to enter the mosque world, which may consist of scowling bearded men who will not speak to you.

If you're a Muslim woman convert in those parts of the north of England where mosques are heavily Asian in character, you have to learn a lot about those Asian cultures, as well as about Islam.

Under the scowls you may meet shyness, gentleness, piety, genuine friendliness, hospitality, and generosity - but it is regarded as rude for a man to appear eager to talk to women or look at them with more than a mere glance.

And many mosques don't yet have enough room for the women folk to pray there as well.

### **Gaining confidence**

But we converts are gaining in confidence. We no longer feel we have to pretend to be Arabs or Pakistanis in order to belong.

We now know there are Muslims in every place in the world, from Eskimo to Aborigine.

We may take an Arabic name, or we may choose to keep our old names; it doesn't really matter.

The ladies may opt for a costume that consists of loose trousers and long shirts or long skirts.

If we feel out of it at the local mosque because we don't understand the language, we are beginning to get organized with house-mosques and groups of our own, where we can invite the Asians to be our guests.

### **Many kinds of Muslim, one family**

We converts are beginning to have read enough and studied enough to voice our own opinions about things. We have become mature enough to

realize that not every Muslim is a saint - people are people, and most of us are far from perfect.

We get over the disappointment of discovering that not every Muslim is living the Muslim way of life to perfection. It doesn't make us give up or accuse them of hypocrisy; we just do our best to live our own lives in the best way we can.

Gradually each convert wakes up to the fact that there are many different styles of Muslim.

Some Muslims are spiritual while some are ritualistic.

But we converts increasingly feel we can take our place alongside the others in this vast Ummah or family, and so long as we are doing our best, Allah will reward our good intentions.

## Jamie Bor: From a model to a Muslim Woman

*Peace be upon you.*

My name is Jamie.

I was born and raised as modern non-sectarian Christian. I did not find in Christianity answers to what I was searching for. For 31 years as a Christian, I did not once feel the existence of Allah. I tried my best, but I could not feel His existence at all.

I was a model in my country for five years. I had drugs during that stage. I used to have it as an assistant to lose weight. I wanted to take drugs only once to avoid overeating. I used to believe that I am strong, and I would be able to avoid addiction which turns everyone who takes it into an addict. I thought I will use it for two weeks, but I turned to an addict day and night. Drugs hurled me to the abyss and to absolute destruction. My husband used to take drugs too what caused him to be violent with me. I even was afraid on my life.

Then I decided to stop being a druggie for that was not the life I wanted. I told him I want to stop. He laughed and said: *«You will not be able to.»* I told him: *«I will.»* As such I stopped, and since that day I did not look backwards again. I did not have any program for rehabilitation, any external help, or support system. My husband used to laugh trying to make me refrain from my decision and return to drugs again. Later on, I delivered my small baby, and my total view of life changed completely. I loved that adorable small baby who needs a good mother. I loved him so very much. Thus I wanted to change everything I used to care for in the past for his sake.

In the past, I was able to do anything I wanted to do. I was part of Hollywood which everyone would wish to be a part of. I wasn't that much a conservative person before converting to Islam. I was not a good person either. In the past, I used to drink, and I was an addict, but now I do not wish to do any of these things anymore.

I made a research about Islam for a period of time before converting into Islam. I wanted to know above all the reason that makes Muslims hated to this extent after watching the news and seeing the oppression and violence.

This pushed me to search for the truth and to know whether Islam was really as such. I started my search, and the more I searched, the deeper I reached until I found the truth.

Many people were stunned when I gave up all the previous pleasures to become a Muslim. And what is strange is that the moment I declared *«shahadah»*, I felt that I completely lost all the desire to do these things.

It is really wonderful to enjoy and feel peace in my heart because I am a Muslim.

I believe that the most important thing that made me admire Islam is its show of respect to women. Women are very much respected in Islam; however, our life as women is not easy. We have much to think of and to worry about such as our families, husbands, and children. Bringing up children is something not easy at all. That is in addition to the house chores, cooking, and looking after our husbands....

It is really a tough responsibility.



In fact, Islam respects women for these reasons. The reason for separating us from men in mosques is to avoid the distraction of men. Islam understands the power in our attraction and appearance that catch the attention of men. Islam respects this too. As soon as I understood this, the idea dominated me, and I wanted to become a Muslim. Converting into Islam made me feel different. It made me feel absolute peace. In the past, I used to feel unstable. Many things in my life were unstable. The reason was that I did not take any decision concerning them. I did not have any goal in my mind. I did not have any goal for my existence; however, converting to Islam gave me peace, serenity, and stability, and these were what I wanted in life. My Islam made things true to me and made me fit for them. At last, I had a goal for my life. Now I understand the goal for my life. We do not always have the chance to meet people whom we essentially need to understand them. That made me frequently visit the mosque to get closer to people and to understand them. The more I visited the mosque, the more women got around me, took care of me, and gave me the sympathy found in Islam.

I never in my life, not even once, thought that I would become a Muslim. My convictions about Muslims were very much fallacious. I used not to love them. I used to believe that they are bad, and I never thought - not even once in a million - that I will become one of them.

However, today I am proud and very happy. I want to wear the *hijab* so that people would know that I am a Muslim, and I would not care even if they would hate me. I want to make it clear to them that Allah exists in every person and not only in Middle Easterners.

## Rachel... A US Muslim

### Ex-policewoman

*Peace be upon you and Allah's mercy and blessings.*

My name is **Rachel**. I have embraced Islam.

I was a police officer in Detroit; I worked there from 1996 to 2004. In 2002, fire was opened on me while in duty, and I was about to die.

I never went to the church in fact. I was brought up in a Christian house. My parents were Christian priests. I have read much about Catholicism.

I have noticed that Islam is logical from the intellectual perspective. I did not analyze and study other religions. However, it seems that these religions bear much manmade ideas instead of Allah's code - the original code. This has always annoyed me very much. Then I found that Islam is more historically precise. Its texts are also authentic; they were not distorted through the various traditions.

I believe that in 2002, I was spared death for a reason, and I believe that this reason is to embrace Islam and to become a Muslim. I didn't know how to worship Allah. I didn't know which religion I was supposed to believe in until I met some Muslim friends. They talked to me with much elaboration. They explained many things to me. I felt much worried towards declaring the *Shahadeh* because I don't know many Islamic words so far. One of the sisters who used to take care of me in the mosque helped me declare the *shahadah*. It was really something magnificent. I enjoyed the fact of just saying «**There is no god but Allah**» before all the people in the mosque. That was the most significant event to me. Now I do not fear death anymore. We don't have to fear but Allah, and we must have faith that Allah is One. I know that because I was at the verge of death. If I died on that very day, I wouldn't have known if my fate would have been hell or not. However, now I am absolutely confident, serene, and happy because I know my fate should anything happen to me today. I was about to go crazy should I have continued my work as a police officer because Muslims were attacked in Detroit for no reason at all, especially following the events of September 11, 2001. That was terrible, and it annoyed me very much. I used to defend them saying that Muslims are not necessarily extremists. As a police officer, I was annoyed with what I used to see in the streets. The way in which Muslims were treated was really conscienceless.

I know that learning a new religion might be frustrating for some. In fact, it is a new culture and not a new religion only. It is a new lifestyle. As for me, that was not frustrating. The whole story is that I wanted to learn it more rapidly. I wanted to master it all by myself. However, that was not easy. I had to learn everything via the internet even the way of wearing the *hijab*. That was an amazing experience. I started refraining from many of the prohibited acts such as drinking alcohol and eating pork. Indeed I buy Halal meat now. I am forty years old now. I know that I had the desire to make these changes in my life. It is time to enjoy peace and tranquility in my life and to seek closeness to Allah. I was absolutely ready for this, and I knew that this is what I lacked in my life. Though I haven't memorized the words of praying, when I pray, however, I feel the prayers are very influential, and I feel a great degree of protection.

I read The Holy Qoran every day. I find in it the discipline of Islam, and I learn something new. Muslims also offer much help. Despite the difference in race, they do not judge you if you are American. They rather offer you much support. Everyone treats you kindly and helps in teaching and guiding you.

The thing which appeals to me most in Islam is *hijab*. I really enjoy it, because I am absolutely truthful especially here in Las Vegas where men look at women in a weird way, and this is really frightening. As such I feel much at peace and more secure. As for informing my friends about embracing Islam, I am not sure about their reactions. For example, my best friend since my childhood works in a Catholic church. I know that her reaction to that would be shocking, and we might not be friends afterwards. Some showed me much support and evoked many interesting questions as well. It was nice to convey my ideas to them. Some of the most significant questions which my friends whether men or women evoked are: Why do you cover your head? Why do you cover your arms? The community here, in Las Vegas especially, is absolutely different even compared to the ordinary American communities. People here wear seducing clothes, especially women. I simply say it has to do with decency. I noticed that people look at me in a different way now. Moreover, some of my friends mentioned that some of the people look at me with more respect because men do not look at me as a thing. They look at me as a human being. As for my family, it is a double edged sword. I really miss them as persons; however, I do not miss their religion at all. They were extremely tough with me. I really had extremely frightening and horrible experiences. Since my childhood, they used to accompany me to attend practices of expelling evil spirits. That had horrible emotional impact on me all the time. My parents do not know that I embraced Islam. I didn't have except one of two choices in their viewpoint: either I would be a Christian with a strong personality similar to them, or they would not respect me at all. They had excluded me from the family. That was even before I embraced Islam.

I prefer that I have a Muslim family and that Allah would be in my life. Allah is The Truth and not a collection of rules and laws set by humans. Their religion has caused me much pain. However, this religion (Islam) is not as such.

I want to spread this religion. I want to spread love, happiness, and peace. I want to clarify to people that all these stereotyped samples are supposed to be exterminated and that Islam does not support terrorism but is rather a wonderful way of life. This is exactly what I personally want to convey to people.

## **Alex converted to Islam after his friend's funeral**

*Peace be upon you and Allah's mercy and blessings.*

I was born and brought up in Halifax in Nova Scotia. My father was a white man from Prince Edward in Canada, and my mother was from a society called Locus in Nova Scotia.

My mother was a Christian, and I used to go to Church with her. When she stopped going to church, I was the only one from the family to go there. When I grew older and was in my late teenage, I stopped going to church. I was not interested in the concepts of that religion.

I still believed in God and in many Christian religious convictions, but I did not believe in this religious organization.

I used to live in Dartmouth which lies on the port of Halifax City. I grew up there where there was a large Muslim Pakistani community. I started to learn a bit from them about Islam. One of its members was religious, and I used to see him going to the mosque and praying. I was about 16 years when I first became interested about Islam, and I started asking my friends some questions. When I was seventeen - in the summer between grade 11 and grade 12 - I moved with my father and his wife from Dartmouth to live in Halifax where many Arab Muslims were living. This move was such a big cultural shock to me because when I used to live in Halifax Harbor, there were few Muslims. You would not see them everywhere, and you wouldn't see people wearing *hijab* or anything of this sort. However, in Bedford, there were many Muslim Arabs whom you can know by their features. A while after my arrival, one of the Iraqi brothers knew that I am interested in Islam. So he came and told me that they perform Friday prayers during the lunch break every week in the high school I study in. So he invited me to join them.

The next Friday, I came and *Alhamdulillah* it was a great experience. The speaker (khateeb) was a young man. He was very hospitable and welcoming. I prayed with them though I did not know what I was doing. I was doing what they were doing. After praying, I talked to the khateeb and another man who used to come to prayers every week. One day after we finished praying, that man asked me: «*What do you think about Islam?*» I told him: «*I believe in Islam, and I believe it is the correct religion and the best way of life.*» So he told me: «*You should become a Muslim then!*» Then I felt surprised because I was still young, and I still have a lot to learn. However, he told me: «*You must become a Muslim because you never know when you are going to die.*» So I just laughed because I was still 17. I was still young, and I will not die before I become an old man in my eighties. My hair would turn white, and my children would be around me. So I did not care a lot for what he said.

I went about four or five times afterwards, and then the summer came, and I did not go to school anymore. However, one day in the summer, I was working in a restaurant. We got a surprise call when we were closing. It was the supervisor who told us that Khalid died in a car crash. Khalid was a Palestinian guy who worked with us in the restaurant for a short period of time. He was my friend, and he used to go to school with me, and we graduated together. When I first heard the news, I did not believe it. I called

the supervisor who told us the news, and I could hear her voice on the phone. She was crying. Then I knew it was true and that he died.

I did not know what was taking place. However, on my way home on foot, I started crying in the middle of the street. It was the first time that I know someone my age died. We were both 18. So it hit me very hard.

On the day of the funeral, I learned about wudu (the ritual of ablution) we do before praying. I called my friend, and I learned how to do it. I went with my friend to the mosque in Dartmouth for praying over my late friend «*salat al Janaza*». Then we went to the graveyard of the Muslims.

The situation in the graveyard was very emotional. His brothers and father and everyone were crying.

When they buried him and started putting the soil over him, I myself started crying a lot. Then I turned around and saw the sheikh who told me you must become a Muslim because you never know when you would die. That was a sign from Allah that I could die at anytime, that what he said was true, and that I must become a Muslim.

I knew there was no point in waiting. I went to him right away, and I told him I want to be a Muslim. He told me: «*How are you, Alex? It is nice to see you again. I hope you are still learning about Islam*». *Subhan Allah!* Praise be to Allah. So right over there in front of the mosque- the *masjid*- and next to the graveyard, I said *Shahadeh*: There is no deity to worship except Allah, and Mohammad is His slave and last of Messengers.

Just afterwards, it was time for Maghreb Prayers. One of the brothers asked me if I know how to make wudu. I told him that I know, and I went to the bathroom to make ablution but I forgot the steps. I stayed there for a long time trying to remember all the steps. By the time I finished wudu, they had already finished praying. But the sheikh was still waiting for me, and we prayed together. *Alhamdulillah!* Since then that brother was helpful to me. I met him the next day and every day after for about a week. He taught me *Al Fatiha* Surah and the basis of Islam.

Before Islam, I did not know what to do and what I want. I did not know the best way of living.

I used to live according to my own philosophy. I was getting into some bad habits. *Alhamdulillah*, Allah guided me to the right path before going too far.

Many might think that I converted to Islam just for emotional reasons; but it was not like that at all. In fact, I was already convinced that Islam was the truth. I only needed a push in the right direction. This realization that I may die anytime was a sign to me that if I was convinced in Islam I should not wait until I am twenty or thirty or forty because I don't know if I will live that long. Thus I converted to Islam and started studying about Islam and its basis and principles.

I look forward for the Holy Month of *Ramadan* this year. I want to enjoy its experience again. We perform our religious rituals in a better way such as reading supplications and going to the *masjid* always to recite The Holy Quran.

Now I am much more convinced than before because I saw all of these proofs and miracles of Islam in The Quran.

My life after Islam became much better. Islam gave me the true direction in life which is to live an upright, religious, and righteous life after I used to be confused not knowing the right thing to do.

## **Huda Hasler, Western woman: «Islam starts in the heart»**

I was looking for something but I couldn't find it. For so many years, I was confused. I felt out of place with my friends because they were always partying and drinking beer. That was difficult. And then everything changed.

I used to travel a lot. When I got 30 years old, I decided to settle. I was looking for a job, and I couldn't find one. So I thought to go on a vacation to Dubai, so I went there and after two weeks I had a job offer. My parents were really scared. We all have been very prejudiced about a Western woman going to an Arab country, especially there were incidents like September 11, so everyone expected something bad. I was raised with Muslims. It started when my elder brother converted to Islam because he married a Muslim woman. Being his sister, I wanted to protect him in his decision. So I went with him to Islamic centers and read some Islamic books with him. But it was never really convincing to me to convert.

When I came to Dubai, I was surprised how Muslims treat me with so much respect. I was very comfortable.

Six months before I spoke my Shahada (to witness that there is no God but ALLAH, and Mohammad is the messenger of ALLAH), I started to wear Abaya. My ex-husband didn't like the Abaya. My marriage was a horrible marriage, so slowly I get distanced from him. We decided to get separated, and I was always asking him to move out but he didn't accept.

One morning, I woke up and I decided to become a Muslim. Nobody knew. When I finished my work, I went to a German sister, and I spoke my shahada. When I came home my husband didn't know that I converted to Islam. I asked him: When are you moving out? He said: Today I will move out.

That was a sign from Allah that I took the right decision, because I have been waiting six months to hear this answer from him. It never happened that I lost my faith, I became much stronger, and I started to read more books.

When you have a nice pattern around your skin and you feel very comfortable, the same is for me when I do prayer. Sometimes I feel that time between prayers is too long. Praying makes me happy.

I believe it's challenging. I would never have thought, as I came from a non-spiritual family, that prayers would make me so strong and that I would wake up happily for fajr (dawn) prayer. Now as soon as the azan (call for prayer) is raised, I get up for fajr prayer. It keeps you so strong. I know now, regardless of multiple difficulties I go through every time there is a problem, that so many doors would open and that I would really see somebody there for me.



## How Islam changed my Life

Aminah Assilmi, Ex-Christian, USA

- «How much more we love the light... if once we lived in darkness.»
- When I first embraced Islam, I really did not think it was going to affect my life very much. Islam did not just affect my life; it totally changed it.

### Family life:

My husband and I loved each other very deeply. That love for each other still exists. Still, when I started studying Islam, we started having some difficulties. He saw me changing and did not understand what was happening. Neither did I. But then, I did not even realize I was changing. He decided that the only thing that could make me change was another man. There was no way to make him understand what was changing me because I myself did not know.

After he realized that I was a Muslim, it did not help much. After all... the only reason a woman changes something as fundamental as her religion is another man. He could not find evidence of this other man...but he had to exist. We ended up in a very ugly divorce. The courts determined that the unorthodox religion would be detrimental to the bringing up of my children. So they were removed from my custody.

During the divorce, there was a time when I was told I could make a choice. I could renounce this religion and leave with my children, or renounce my children and leave with my religion. I was in shock. To me this was not a possible choice. If I renounce my Islam....I would be teaching my children how to be deceptive, for there was no way to deny what was in my heart. I could not deny God, not then, not ever. I prayed like I had never prayed before. After the thirty minutes were up, I knew that there was no safer place for my children to be than in the hands of God. If I denied Him, there would be no way in the future to show my children the wonders of being with God. The courts were told that I would leave my children in the hands of God. This was not a rejection of my children!

I left the courts knowing that life without my babies would be very difficult. My heart bled, even though I knew, inside, I had done the right thing. I found solace in Ayat-ul-Kursi.

**«God! There is no god but He the living, the self- subsisting, and supporter of all. No slumber can seize Him nor sleep. His are all things in the heavens and on earth. Who is there can intercede in His presence except as He permitteth? He knoweth what (appeareth to His creatures as) Before or After or Behind them. Nor shall they compass aught of His knowledge except as He willeth. His Throne doth extend over the heavens and the earth, and he feeleth no fatigue in guarding and preserving them for He is Most High, The Supreme (in Glory).»** (Quran 2:255).

This also got me started looking at all the attributes of God and discovering the beauty of each one.

Child custody and divorce were not the only problems I was to face. The rest of my family was not very accepting of my choice either. Most of the family refused to have anything to do with me. My mother was of the belief

that it was just a phase and I would grow out of it. My sister, the mental health expert, was sure I had simply lost my mind and should be institutionalized. My father believed I should be killed before I placed myself deeper in Hell. Suddenly I found myself with no husband and no family. What would be next?

### **Friends:**

Most of my friends drifted away during that first year. I was no fun anymore. I did not want to go to parties or bars. I was not interested in finding a boyfriend. All I ever did was read The Quran and talk about Islam. What a bore! I still did not have enough knowledge to help them understand why Islam was so beautiful.

### **Employment:**

My job was next to go. While I had won just about every award there was in my field and was recognized as a serious trend setter and money maker, the day I put on *hijab* was the end of my job. Now I was without a family, without friends, and without a job.

In all this, the first light was my grandmother. She approved of my choice and joined me. What a surprise! I always knew she had a lot of wisdom, but this! She died soon after that. When I stop to think about it, I almost get jealous. The day she pronounced *Shahadah*, all her misdeeds had been erased, while her good deeds were preserved. She died so soon after accepting Islam that I knew her 'BOOK' was bound to be heavy on the good side. It fills me with such joy!

As my knowledge grew and I was better able to answer questions, many things changed. But it was the changes made in me as a person that had the greatest impact. A few years after I went public with my Islam, my mother called me and said she did not know what this 'Islam thing' was, but she hoped I would stay with it. She liked what it was doing for me. A couple of years after that she called again and asked what a person had to do to be a Muslim. I told her that all what a person had to do was know that there was only ONE God and Mohammed was His Messenger. Her response was: *«Any fool knows that. But what do you have to do? «I repeated the same information, and she said: «Well...OK. But let's not tell your father just yet.»* Little did she know that he had gone through the same conversation a few weeks before. My real father (the one who thought I should be killed) had done it almost two months earlier. Then, my sister, the mental health person, told me that I was the most 'liberated' person she knew. Coming from her, that was the greatest compliment I could have received. Rather than try to tell you about how each person came to accept Islam, let me simply say that more members of my family continue to find Islam every year. I was especially happy when a dear friend, Brother Qaiser Imam, told me that my ex-husband took *Shahadah*. When Brother Qaiser asked him why, he said it was because he had been watching me for 16 years, and he wanted his daughter to have what I had. He came and asked me to forgive him for all he had done. I had forgiven him long before that.

Now my oldest son, Whitney, has called, as I am writing this book, and announced that he also wants to become Muslim. He plans on taking the

*Shahadah* at the ISNA Convention in a couple of weeks. For now, he is learning as much as he can. God is The Most Merciful.

Over the years, I have come to be known for my talks on Islam, and many listeners have chosen to be Muslims. My inner peace has continued to increase with my knowledge and confidence in the Wisdom of God. I know that God is not only my Creator but, my dearest friend. I know that God will always be there and will never reject me. For every step I take toward God, He takes 10 toward me. What a wonderful knowledge.

True, God has tested me, as was promised, and rewarded me far beyond what I could ever have hoped for. A few years ago, the doctors told me I had cancer, and it was terminal. They explained that there was no cure, it was far too advanced, and proceeded to help prepare me for my death by explaining how the disease would progress I had maybe one year left to live. I was concerned about my children, especially my youngest. Who would take care of him? Still I was not depressed. We must all die. I was confident that the pain I was experiencing contained blessings.

I remembered a good friend, Kareem Al-masawi, who died of cancer when he was still in his 20's. Shortly before he died, he told me that God was truly Merciful. This man was in unbelievable anguish and radiating with God's love. He said: *«God intends that I should enter heaven with a clean book.»* His death experience gave me something to think about. He taught me of God's love and mercy. This was something no one else had ever really discussed. God's love!

It did not take me long to start being aware of His blessings. Friends who loved me came out of nowhere. I was given the gift of making Hajj. Even more importantly, I learned how very important it was for me to share the Truth of Islam with everyone. It did not matter if people, Muslim or not, agreed with me or even liked me. The only approval I needed was from God. The only love I needed was from God. Yet, I discovered more and more people who, for no apparent reason, loved me. I rejoiced, for I remembered reading that if God loves you, He causes others to love you. I am not worthy of all the love. That means it must be another gift from God. God is the Greatest!

There is no way to fully explain how my life changed. *Alhamdulillah* (All praise is due to God)! I am so very glad that I am a Muslim. Islam is my life. Islam is the beat of my heart. Islam is the blood that courses through my veins. Islam is my strength. Islam is my life so wonderful and beautiful. Without Islam, I am nothing, and should God ever turn His magnificent face from me, I could not survive.

*«O God! let my heart have light, and my sight have light, and my hearing (senses) have light, and let me have light on my right, and let me have light on my left, and let me have light above me, and have light under me, and have light in front of me, and have light behind me; and let me have light.»*

*«Oh my Lord! Forgive my sins and my ignorance and my exceeding the limits (boundaries of righteousness) in all my deeds and what you know better than I. O God! Forgive my mistakes, those done intentionally or out of my ignorance or (without) or with seriousness, and I confess that all such mistakes are done by me. Oh God! Forgive my sins of the past and of the*

*future which I did openly or secretly. You are the One Who makes the things go before, and You are the One who delays them, and You are the Omnipotent.»*

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