

First Edition

Why I Chose Islam?

Stories About
New Muslims' Journeys to Islam

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Introduction

Introduction

شهر الحجة والمعتمر
SHAHR AL-HAJJAH
KAMADAN KAREEM

پیشکش کنندہ
پروفیسر ڈاکٹر محمد رفیق

The process of conversion or reversion isn't a simple journey, and sometimes a person feels rather alone, understandably so.

While all information regarding Islam is devoured, it is without doubt, sometimes confusing with the volume and variety of sources available, so many opinions, and so many Quranic verses and *hadiths* to back up all these opinions!

For the new convert who is just learning and isn't quite yet sure what is opinion and what is the fact, may be awe-inspiring.

There are many obstacles to be found on the path of the person who has just said his or her *shahadah* and some of those start right on day one.

God brings everyone to Islam on the path that suits them best and He then sends them tests to confirm their faith. So there is no one right way to make the adjustment to the new life as a Muslim, but there are some general suggestions that could help to make the journey smoother.



- *My Discovery*

- *Many Changes Happened*

About five years ago, I was fifty-two years old and a Christian.

I had not become a member of any Christian church, but all my life I had been searching for the truth.

I attended many churches and studied with their teachers. All fell short and I recognized none as being the truth about Allah.

Since I was nine years old, I had read the Bible every day of my life. I cannot tell you, over the many years, how many times I searched it for the truth.

During the long years of my search for the truth, I studied with many religious faiths. For over a year I studied two times a week with a Catholic priest, but could not accept Catholic beliefs. I spent another year studying with the Jehovah Witnesses and did not accept their beliefs either.

I spent nearly two years with the LDS (Latter-Day Saints, i.e. the Mormons) and still did not find truth. I had a Jewish friend and we had many discussions about the Jewish beliefs. I went to many Protestant churches, some



for months at a time, trying to find answers to my questions.

My heart told me Jesus was not God but a Prophet. My heart told me Adam and Eve were responsible for their sin, not me. My heart told me I should pray to God and no other. My reason told me that I was responsible for both my good and bad deeds and that God would never assume the form of a man in order to tell me that I was not responsible. He had no need to live and die as a human; after all, He **is** God.

So there I was, full of questions and praying to God for help. I had a real fear of dying and not knowing the truth. I prayed and I prayed. I received answers from preachers and priests like, "This is a mystery." I felt that God wanted people to go to heaven so He wouldn't make it a mystery as to how to get there, how to live life accordingly, and how to understand Him. I knew in my heart that all that I was hearing was untrue.

■ My Discovery

About four years ago, I retired after twenty-four years as a police officer. My husband also retired as a police officer. The year before my retirement I was still a police sergeant/supervisor. Police officers worldwide have a common bond, which we call a law-enforcement brother-sisterhood. We always help one another no matter what police department or country.

That year I received a flyer asking for help with a group of Saudi Arabian police officers who had come to the United States to learn English at a local University and attend a police academy in the city that I live in. The Saudi police officers were looking for homes to live in with host families in order to learn about US customs and to practice the English that they would be learning.

My son is raising my granddaughter as a single parent. We helped him to find a house next to ours so that we could help in raising her. I talked to my husband and we decided that it would be good to help these police officers. It would be an opportunity for our granddaughter to learn about

people from another country. I was told that the young men were Muslims and I was very curious.

An Arizona State University Saudi interpreter brought a young man named Abdul to meet us. He could speak no English. We showed him a bedroom and bathroom, which would be his when he stayed with us. I liked Abdul immediately. His respectful and kind manner won my heart!

Next Fahd was brought to our home. He was younger and shyer, but a wonderful young man. I became their tutor and we shared many discussions about police work, the USA, Saudi Arabia, Islam, etc. I observed how they helped each other and also the other sixteen Saudi police officers who came to the USA to learn English.

During the year they were here, I came to respect and admire Fahd and Abdul for not letting the American culture have any impact on them. They went to mosque on Fridays, said their prayers no matter how tired they were, and were always careful of what they ate, etc. They showed me how to cook some traditional Saudi foods and they took me to Arab markets and restaurants. They were

very kind with my granddaughter. They showered her with presents, jokes and friendship.

They treated my husband and me with much respect. Each day, they would call to see if I needed them to go to market for me before they went to study with their fellow Saudi officers.

One day, I asked them if they had an extra Quran. I wanted to read what it had to say. They sent to their embassy in Washington DC and they got me an English Quran, tapes, and other pamphlets. At my request, we began to discuss Islam (they had to speak English and this became the focus of our tutoring sessions).

My "foster sons" were to return home to Saudi Arabia, I planned a family dinner with all their favorite traditional foods (I bought some because I didn't know how to cook all of them). I purchased a hijab and an *abaya* (long Islamic gown). I wanted them to go home remembering me dressed appropriately as a Muslim sister.

Before we ate, I said the *Shahadah* (public declaration of faith). The boys cried and laughed and it was so special. I believe in my heart that Allah sent the boys to me in

answer to my years of prayers. I believe He chose me to see the truth by the light of Islam. I believe Allah sent Islam to my very home. I praise Him for His mercy, love and kindness to me.



■ Many Changes Happened

My Saudi boys returned to their homeland about a week after my reversion. I missed them greatly, but was still happy. I had joined the local mosque as a member almost immediately after my reversion and registered myself as a Muslim. I was anticipating a warm welcome from my new Muslim community. I thought all Muslims were like my Saudi boys and the other young Saudi officers whom I had met and spent time with during the previous year.

My family was still in a state of shock! They thought I would stick with this new religion for a while, become disgruntled, and move on to another religion as I had done all my adult life. They were surprised at the changes that I began to make in my daily life. My husband is a congenial man, so when I said that we were going to be eating halal foods and eliminating haram (forbidden) foods, he said, "Okay."

Next I wrote a letter to my non-Muslim family telling them about my reversion and how it would and wouldn't change our family relationships. I explained a few of the basics of Islam. Still my family kept their own counsel, and

I continued to work on learning prayer and reading my Quran. I got active in sister groups on the Internet and this facilitated my learning about my new beliefs.

I also attended a “Fundamentals of Islam” class at the mosque when I could get away from my work. I was still a state police sergeant and it was difficult – no, impossible to cover. This became a source of real discontent and concern for me. Just eight months and I could retire, so I asked for and was granted the right to telecommute from my home three days a week doing planning and research projects.

After the first six months had passed, sisters at the mosque that I attended still hadn't warmed up to me. I was disappointed. I began to feel like an outsider. I was puzzled and concerned. I tried to become active in community services with a few sisters who had been



friendly towards me. I looked for the kindness, friendship, and best of manners that were practiced each and every day by my Saudi boys.

I made many mistakes at the mosque, such as talking in the prayer room as I tried to get up and down from the floor. I went to a community celebration and ate with my left hand; I wore clear nail polish on my trimmed nails and got scolded. I did *wudu* (ablutions) incorrectly and was frowned at. I became very discouraged.

Then one day I received a package in the mail from a sister-friend who I had met on the Internet. In the package were several *abayas*, *hijabs*, silk stockings, and a warm and friendly note welcoming me as her sister in Islam. She lives in Kuwait. Next a dear sister sent me a prayer robe and prayer rug she had hand-made herself. This dear sister lives in Saudi Arabia.

I got an email that had a statement that I always remember at times when I get that “outsider” feeling. The note said: “I am glad that I became Muslim before I met many Muslims.” This is not an insult. It was a reminder that Islam is perfect and it is we Muslims who are imperfect. Just as I have shortcomings, so may my sisters and

brothers. I also began to understand what I personally believe to be one of the greatest gifts that Allah gave to the Muslims: the sister and brotherhood in Islam.

Over the past four years my life has changed dramatically. My family has come to accept with generosity and tolerance that I am Muslim and will remain Muslim. All thanks be to Allah for sparing me the trials of so many reverts who must deal with beloved family who strive to dissuade them from Islam.

As my health continued to fail and I grew weaker physically, I had to discontinue community service work and became more isolated from the local Muslim community. I continued to work hard on my prayer, having great difficulty with the Arabic pronunciation but not giving up.

My Islamic teacher made some cassette tapes, and a sister brought them to my home to help me. After two years, I had learned to recite four *Surahs* (chapters) of the Quran. This may seem like a small number to most Muslims, but for me it was a very big accomplishment. I set about learning the words for the other parts of prayer; another two years of struggle.

During the early part of my third year as a Muslim, I suffered a heart attack and had heart surgery. It was a sad time for me, as I knew that I would never again touch my head to the floor when praying, but would forever have to sit in my chair and pray. It was at this time that I truly understood the provision from Allah that Islam is the religion of ease. Praying while seated in a chair is acceptable; not fasting when one is sick is acceptable. I did not have to feel that I was less a Muslim because of these circumstances.

After visiting several mosques and observing that they were like mini United Nations, I began to see that the small groups within the mosque were mostly formed because of language and culture and not because of liking or disliking any person. I felt good that regardless of these differences, I could always count on a smile and an “*As-Salaam’ Alaykum!*”

After a while, I began to gravitate towards sisters who are reverts to Islam like me. We have much in common - we experience many of the same trials, such as non-Muslim family members, difficulty pronouncing Arabic, being

lonely on Muslim holidays, and not having a family member to break fast with during Ramadan.

Sometimes our reversions meant losing life-long friends who just couldn't accept our new habits, or it was because of our discontinuance of activities common to non-Muslims, such as dancing and mixing in groups.

As I grew less able to do community services, I searched for some way to contribute to the greater Muslim community. I continually asked Allah for His help in this. One day, my young granddaughter suggested that I write books about my Saudi boys, Islam, and my family's experience with Islam. I decided to write the books and also include stories about a group of young girls, both Muslim and non-Muslim, who were friends. The stories would include the young girls' problems encountered at school and at home and I would use my knowledge of Islam as a guide for these book characters.

I began writing a book series that I called Islamic Rose Books. I created an e-group for sister authors and aspiring writers and this developed into the creation of the Islamic Writers Alliance. The Alliance is an international

organization created to provide support for female Muslim authors and aspiring writers.

Our main goal is to help each other promote our works to readers and publishers. I also decided to help two Muslim food banks by creating databases that help them to track their inventory, clients, and contacts and to create reports necessary for funding purposes. I decided that I would spend a large portion of my profits from book sales to buy books for Islamic children's libraries. I have discovered that many such libraries have lots of empty shelves where Islamic books belong.

I still have much to learn about Islam. I never tire of reading the Quran and one of my favorite pastimes is reading about prominent, historical Islamic figures. When I am unsure about something in Islam, I look to the *Sunnah* of the Prophet (peace be upon him). I see how he responded to situations and use this as my guide.

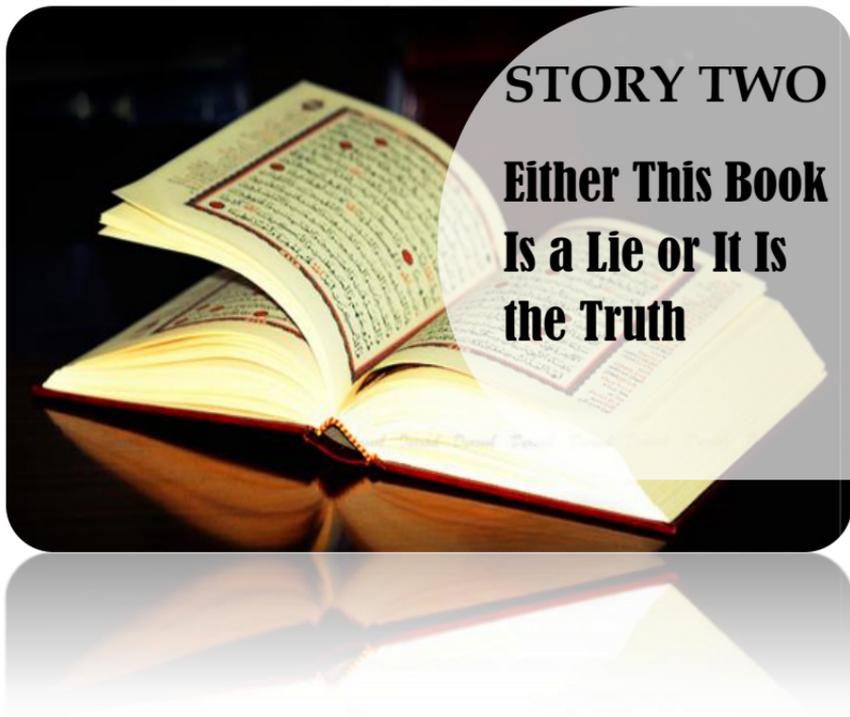
My journey in Islam will continue, and I look forward to many new experiences. I thank Allah daily for His Mercy and Love.

Please find the full story [here](#).

Story 1

Allah Sent Islam to My Very Home | 20





STORY TWO

**Either This Book
Is a Lie or It Is
the Truth**

- *My Best Friend: A Muslim?*
- *Light of Guidance*
- *Reading the Quran at Last*

It is ironic that God has guided me to Islam (the Truth) in the United States, where unbelief ideology dominates the society. Especially more so, when I have spent 5 years of my childhood in Muslim dominated societies (countries).

My parents are from Korea, they were raised atheist but in their youth they found Christianity to be the Truth. They hold positions/titles in their church (they were Deacons, but now they have been raised to higher ranking). They had me baptized when I was born, and raised my brothers and I as Christians.

My father was in charge of the construction division of Hyundai Corporation. He lived in many countries overseeing the building and construction projects for Hyundai Corporation. When my father was stationed in Indonesia, our family moved there for two and a half years. Being an infant at the time, I do not remember much of Indonesia. However, I remember my two and a half year stay in Saudi Arabia very clearly.



My father had stayed in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia for nine years building and constructing for the Saudi Royal family. We (our family) joined him on his last two and a half years in the Kingdom. My experience in Saudi had been a memorable one; I got to experience and see many things. We had a very luxurious life in Saudi; however our experience with the people there in general had been a bad one.

My father, to this day, hates Arabs (Saudis, but to my father they are all the same) for his ill treatment by the Saudis during his stay. I remember him complaining how arrogant the Saudis were, and how they looked down upon him with bad manners, how backward they were, how risky it was doing business with them, etc...

As for me, I had my own problems. I remember getting into fights with the Saudi kids every other day, my brothers and I could not play in the playground because the kids would start throwing rocks at us if we got close to the playground. With these memorable experiences, we moved to the United States.

I was 10 years old when we came to the United States, my brothers and I pretty much grew up in the States. I was

Americanized as can be, and even though I befriended many ethnic groups, I did not get along with the Asians, Koreans especially. Needless to say, I did not care much for the Arab kids; I tried to pick on them every chance I got.



■ My Best Friend: A Muslim?

I had a very close friend in High School (we will call him A.C. for anonymity), we played football together, and we tried to pull as many pranks as possible when the opportunities presented themselves. A pair of knuckleheads who could not avoid trouble to save their own lives. But through this friendship, Allah guided a lost soul to Islam (the Truth).

After High School, I moved out of town and went to college. My parents had gone back to Korea when I was in High School, so I was used to being independent (except financially). I reached my peak in terms of misguidance (being lost) while I was in college.

The environment I was in was such that it only led me deeper and deeper into misguidance and self-destruction. But I was oblivious to this fact, and even if I did know I probably would not have cared. I was in this state when I received a phone call from A.C., my close friend from High School. He had called to tell me that he had become a Muslim. I did not take it seriously at first, because I knew that he was going through some personal problems at the

time. I thought that he was going through a phase, and he would snap out of it once he cleared his problems.

But as time passed, it became obvious that my friend had become a fanatic (so I thought at the time). I started to avoid talking to him, all he would talk about was Islam and we would end up having a religious argument, him for Islam and I for Christianity. It came to a point that whenever he called, I would find an excuse not to talk to him.

Because my parents were in Korea, I did not have a place to stay when I came back to my hometown. I used to stay with A.C. Whenever I was in town; his family treated me like a second son (May Allah guide them, *Ameen*). But after A.C. had become a Muslim, I started to avoid staying with him. It happened so that I came back in town for a break from college. I stayed with another friend of mine from high school instead of A.C. One night, my friends and I went out to a party hosted by another friend from high school, but somehow A.C. found out.

A.C. called the place where the party was going on and asked to speak with me. When I picked up the phone, A.C. told me to stand and wait for him outside. I felt a little

guilty because I had been trying to avoid him all break, so I decided to wait for him outside. Some of the people at the party asked me where I was going, so I told them that I was going outside to meet A.C. They decided to come outside with me they were also friends with A.C. when we were in High School. When A.C. pulled up in his car, he did not even get out of the car he rolled down his window and told me to get in the car. I could sense a bit of urgency in his voice, so I got into the car.



■ Light of Guidance

A.C. and I spent the rest of the night talking about religion. A.C. pulled out a book by Ahmed Deedat, and started to ask me things that I could not answer. It was still very early in the morning and we were still discussing religion, when A.C. asked me if I would like to accompany him to the Mosque for Morning Prayer. I consented and we went to the Mosque.

There, in the Mosque, as I stood in the back and watched, I saw something which I never saw in any church. As people came in, I saw people of different ethnicity and social and financial status, they lined up next to each other filling the line. I remember saying to myself “that’s something you don’t see every day”.

After the prayer, a Muslim came up to me and asked me if I was a Muslim. I said “No”, and he started to give me *da'wah*. He was a very nice person, but unfortunately his *da'wah* did not reach me at that time (but eventually I would benefit from his *da'wah*).

By this time, A.C. and two other Muslims had approached me, and one of them invited us for breakfast. So we ended up at a house eating breakfast, and the brothers started giving me *da'wah*. We watched a film about three youths who converted (reverted, I should say) to Islam, the host and another brother who was with us were two of the three youths in the film. It was all very convincing, but something was holding me back. I was not ready to accept the Truth yet.

A.C. and I thanked the host for the breakfast, and were getting ready to leave when the host gave me a copy of the Quran (English translation) as a gift. I thanked him and we parted. A.C. had made me promise him that I would read the Quran (English translation), and with that we parted and I went back to my college.

It was not long before I settled back into my usual college life again. A.C. called every now and then to see what was going on with me. He would ask me if I had read the Quran (English Translation), and my answer would be "Not yet, but I am going to". And the Quran was sitting on my bookshelf, collecting dust all the while. One night,

when all my friends have gone out, I decided to stay in and do some school work.



■ Reading the Quran at Last

I finished studying early and was left to ponder what to do next. Then I saw the Quran sitting on my bookshelf, and I said to myself “Why not, what could it hurt”. So I picked up the Quran and started to read. Never in my life have I heard a truer speech than the Quran.

{This is the Book; in it is guidance sure, without doubt; to those who fear Allah.} (Al-Baqarah: [2:2](#))

What a bold statement! I said to myself, “Either this book is a lie or it is the Truth”. But as I read, it became very clear to me that there is no falsehood in it. I was not able to put it down, I read and read through the whole night. I was shocked and amazed, I said to myself: “This is simply the Truth”.

A whole lot of things started to swirl in my head, my parents, my family, my friends, the worldly life that I was so indulged in. But everything became insignificant before the Truth, except for my family, thoughts were coming into my head: “What are my parents going to say? What

are my brothers going to say? What if my family disowns me? What if they cut me off (both kinship and financially)?

But Allah is the best of planners! Around 6 a.m., I was still reading the Quran when the phone rang. I picked up the phone and it was brother A.C., he started with the usual “How are you doing? How is your school? How is your ...”? The whole time, I kept quiet and said little, brother A.C. sensing something unusual asked me: “What is wrong?”

How can I deny myself the Truth after finding out about it? “What is wrong?” asked brother A.C., “How do you become a Muslim?” I asked. Brother A.C. was surprised (in a good way I am sure). A.C. told me to repeat after him:

“I bear witness that there is no deity worthy of worship except Allah, and Muhammad (peace be upon him) is His messenger ... *Ashadu ala ilaha ilallah, wa ashadu anna Muhammadan Rasululah.*”

May Allah reward (better than the worldly life and all that is in it) brother A.C. for his patience and efforts, and guide him to the straight path, Amen.

May Allah reward (better than the worldly life and all that is in it) all the brothers who helped me find the Truth, and guide them to the straight path, Amen.

May Allah guide us all to the straight path and save us from the Hell fire, Amen.

All praise and thanks be to Allah, the Lord of all the Worlds.

Please read the story at [this](#) link.





- *My Mind Reeled*

My mother was an officer in the United States Navy so we moved quite a few times growing up.

But I spent most of my childhood years in Pensacola, Florida, a town with a population of about 50,000 people.

Pensacola is most well-known for its US Naval base and its Brownsville Revival Church.

On Sunday nights, you could hear the church music from miles away. My parents instilled in me a love of learning and an inquisitive nature from an early age. They taught me to "think outside the box" and find truth inside myself. They never encouraged me to conform. They nurtured independent minds in both my brother and me.

I will never forget the moment it occurred to me that I had the power within myself to discern the basic truth about my creation. I was in middle school. I had completed my assignment half an hour early and I was quietly occupying myself with my thoughts. That's when I first discovered my natural religion.



It came to me as I was staring at our classroom whiteboard, considering the significance of the myriad of information it contained. On this board, you could find the date, our homework assignments, the lesson, and you could even see the ghosts of yesterday's whiteboard contents in the corners where the eraser hadn't quite reached.

It suddenly struck me that my brain was like this whiteboard. The only difference was that, while the contents of our classroom whiteboard had been deliberately and carefully mapped out by its owner, my brain's whiteboard had been indiscriminately written upon by every image, song, book, expression, lecture, and argument to which I had ever been exposed. I imagined that, if I could see it, it would be a chaotic, indecipherable mess. This disturbed me, but then I wondered: If the images, writings, and hidden messages could be erased, what would I find beneath?

I realized there must be, beneath all that I had soaked up, me. I recognized that under all that "information" would be my uncorrupted self. And on the tails of that hypothesis

was the realization that if I could communicate with my inner nature, I could find what beliefs were natural to me.

Did I have a purpose or was I incidental?

I decided to invest all my efforts at bringing forth a mental image of my whiteboard. On the board, would be written everything I "knew" about religion. And in my mind, I would stand in front of that board wielding an eraser, ready to find the truth beneath.

First, I came upon the memorized biblical verses from Baptist daycare: "For God so loved the world..." - erased. Next came the mantras of Christian Science Sunday School, "There is no life, truth, intelligence, nor substance in matter..." - erased. And then there was a discussion I had overheard between my aunt and my parents, "Energy can be neither created nor destroyed..." - erased.

I erased it all. All the sad-eyed images of Jesus, all the verses, all the lessons, the documentaries - everything - I vanquished them. And only a shining whiteboard remained.

Mentally, I set down my eraser and I picked up a pen. I hesitated. What should I write? I started a sentence and stopped myself, suddenly very unsure. And then I asked myself the burning question that while I yearned to ask, I feared as well. I asked, "what if there is no such thing as God?" Immediately the answer ripped through my brain with almost terrifying force, shaking my whiteboard on its hinges, "Don't say that!" My nature screamed at me, "God can hear you!"

That was it. From my very nature the answer was clear: I knew God could hear me. I was not incidental; I was created. I lifted my pen and wrote simply: "I was created by God." This was my natural religion.

From then on, I carried my natural religion with me and protected it fiercely. I guarded it jealously from whatever theories, philosophies, or doctrines might indiscriminately attempt to etch themselves upon my precious whiteboard. I became skeptical of the things trusted adults might tell me.

I asked questions in Sunday school: How could God be human? How could God die? Why would God have a son? Why would God kill His son for my sins? Could God not

simply forgive sin? Would you have me believe that I am more merciful than God? And the answers to these questions were either "Take it on faith," or an obvious lie.

My skepticism became cynicism. I was angry that these adults, ostensibly wiser than me, seemed intent on corrupting my inner truth. I began to hate Christianity. But I did not hate the Bible. I read the Bible and I felt love for Jesus. I felt love for the prophets. So I clung to that love and to the knowledge that my creation was no accident. I clung to my natural religion.

It wasn't until my first year of high school, that I learned what a Muslim was. My world-history teacher introduced us to Islam as part of our studies of the Arab world. Her lecture on Islamic theology was brief but shocking. She told us that there are one billion Muslims in the world. Muslims believe in One God. They believe Jesus was a prophet. It is an Abrahamic religion.

I listened in awe. And she mentioned a person who I had never heard of: Muhammad. She described him as a brilliant political leader who claimed to have received a revelation from God, called "Quran", while meditating in a cave. She described him accurately, but without love. The

religion she portrayed sounded very foreign and masculine, but nonetheless it intrigued me. I resolved myself to read this revelation of Muhammad's, this "Quran."

From the day I bought it, my Quran was my favorite book. I didn't treat it like my other books. This book demanded respect. The cover had been so lovingly designed with its leather binding and lovely gold engravings. Inside, the Arabic text nestled next to the English translation fascinated me. When I carried it with me, I wrapped it in a lovely hand stitched blanket I had owned since I was a baby. I didn't want my school books rubbing against it and disturbing it.

I read the Quran patiently. In a way, I knew it was true before I read it. But the cynic in me held out, until I read one simple verse which hushed every doubt in me:

{Not for idle sport did I create the heavens and the earth and all that is between! If it had been My wish to take just a pastime, I should surely have taken it from the things nearest to Me, if I would do such a thing! Nay, I hurl the Truth against falsehood, and it knocks out its brain, and behold, falsehood does

perish! Ah! Woe be to you for the false things you ascribe to Me.) ([21:16-8](#))



■ My Mind Reeled

"Allah hurls truth against falsehood and knocks out its brain." I was not created idly. I am no plaything.

It all came together, my memory of my mental whiteboard shaking on its hinges and that violent cry, "God can hear you!" This verse explained it all. Allah hurls truth against falsehood and knocks out its brain.

This book was my natural religion. My natural religion was Islam.

Just about one year after I finished reading the Quran for the first time, at the age of 16, I took my *Shahadah*. My parents, may Allah bless them and guide them, accepted my conversion from the very first day. I explained to my mother what the words of my *Shahadah* meant. She was surprised and curious. Shortly after I began wearing a headscarf in public, my father received some tracts in the mail which slandered Islam and Prophet Muhammad. They were sent anonymously by someone who wished to "warn" him about the "evil" religion I had embraced.

I remember my father threw them away in distaste. And he bought a book about Islam written by a Muslim to study up on my new faith. My parents make me feel very blessed.

The simple truth of Islam gives a life simple truth and meaning. Making such a huge change in direction can give a person perspective on life, one that will influence every decision they make from that day forward.

Seven years since I took my *Shahadah*, I am now married with four children. Sometimes I look at my children in awe and try to imagine where I might be had my life followed a more conventional path. And frankly, it feels like I have been saved from something too terrible to imagine.

Islam encompasses everything I have, and more importantly everything I hope to be. I can only aspire to live up to all the blessings I have been given. All praise only due to Allah. And all thanks to Him. And there is nothing worthy of worship except Allah.

Please read the story [here](#).



**STORY
FOUR**

**Islam Is Not
What the Media
Makes it Out to
Be!**

- *Trying to Understand Islam and Muslims*
- *I Read and I Believed*
- *My First Visit to the Masjid and Imam*

My name is Ethel Mae Blizzard, and I live in San Diego, California USA and here is my story on how I became Muslim.

When I was twelve years old, the elders of the Mormon Church would come over and talk to us about the Mormon religion and how Jesus met with Prophet Joseph Smith in the woods and told him about the book of Mormon and so on. When it was time, I was baptized into the Mormon faith. My mother said it was up to me to choose my religion; I chose to be with my mother.



From age 12 to 16, I was somewhat active in the church going on Sundays and Mondays for family home evenings and Wednesday nights for sisters. But I eventually backed off and by age 18, I really didn't believe in the Mormon religion. I never felt anything in my heart but I knew there was a God out there somewhere.

For the next 29 years, I've been soul searching for the right religion for me; one where I could believe in and feel it in

my heart. I visited different religions such as: Judaism, Baptism, Seventh Day Adventist, Jehovah's Witnesses, Catholics and other Christian faiths. During the next few years, I gave up and hoped one day I would find what I was looking for.

I decided to go online one day looking for a life partner. I was on Arab Match.com and a lady sent me a message and thought I would be a good match for her friend. She introduced us and we talked at first.

Then, a month later we talked for the next 3 months and fell in love. He told me he was Muslim, and I was like: "Ok so what?", it did not bother me. He wanted me to find out if we could marry in a mosque. I was not sure if we could because I was Christian.



■ Trying to Understand Islam and Muslims

I asked a friend of mine who is from Turkey and she told me about Masjid Abu Bakr. So, I went to Masjid Abu Bakr to find this *imam* of whom I had no idea what it meant being.

I waited outside for a while and was asked if I needed some help, I said: "Yes, I need to talk to someone who is in charge or who could answer a question for me." Immediately, it was *Imam* Taha who came to talk to me. I said ok no problem.

It just so happened that I came right when a prayer was coming in and *Imam* Taha had said he needed to talk to me more about this. So he asked me if I could come back and we would discuss it more. I was like sure no problem. I'm not in a hurry.

The next few days I visited my Turkish friend who was at work and asked her some questions about Muslims and the Muslim religion. She told me Muslim is not a religion it is Islam that is the religion.

I had asked her who Allah is then. She told me: "Allah is God." And I said back to her: "Oh, they believe in God, I had no idea." I don't mean to sound ignorant, but I was. This made a huge difference to me now I knew they believe in God.

Then I asked her what do Muslims believe and what is Islam and what does it mean. She let me know that Islam is a peaceful religion and not what the media makes it out to be. She let me know Muslims are peaceful people.



■ My First Visit to the Masjid and Imam

I asked her: "Are you Muslim." She said: "Yes." I was so surprised. As she was not dressed like a Muslim and did not wear Hijab or cover at all. She told me she would get a number for me to talk to someone. Her mother knows someone at this Masjid and recommended me to see the *Sheikh* of the community. This *Sheikh* happened to be *Sheikh* Saad.

I think mainly because this is where they went and I had no idea who was who at that time. So I said: "Sure, ok I will call him." Within a couple of weeks, I was hit by another car and they totaled my car. I had not seen *Sheikh* Saad yet.

Before I ever spoke to *Sheikh* Saad, I was hit in a car accident on Friday, May 11th, 2007 and my car was totaled. I made a call to *Sheikh* Saad and told him of my intent to meet with him and I had some general questions for him.

He gave me a time and date for me to come in. I asked my neighbor Julie if she could please take me and she wanted to know why? I told her I need to talk to their *Sheikh* who

is like a bishop in a church or a pastor; that I wanted to know more about this religion and marriage.

She was not too happy and questioned me about it more. I just said it is important please can you take me, she finally gave in and said ok. I called Julie and left her a reminder of my appointment. The day of my appointment came and I called her, no answer, I called again still no answer, and I waited for her.

I went over to her house to find she was not there. I figured she did not care to take me to a Muslim Masjid. So, I ended up calling *Sheikh* Saad to let him know I was not going to make it. He just said: "Don't worry, come anytime." And he gave me the office hours.

I called Julie several times to let her know she forgot about my appointment. I did not hear from her for several days and finally, she answered my call and said she would take me the next day. The next day, I called her and no answer.

The bus system out here is not that great in Santee and it is hot desert sun. I told her: "I really want to go Julie, please take me, this is very important I feel I need to go. Please understand ok."

Julie took me and dropped me off at Al Ribat. This was the day I finally got to meet with *Sheikh* Saad for the first time. As I approached the mosque, I felt something good was going to come out of this but could not determine what it would be.

I went inside and one of the gentlemen asked me could he help me I told him, I am here to see *Sheikh* Saad and that he is expecting me. Immediately, the guy went into his office and let him know.

Then *Sheikh* Saad came out to greet me, and as I walked down the stairs, I was gently asked to take off my shoes, and I thought, how weird this is, take off my shoes. I was thinking: Why? I did not want to take off my shoes and I had never heard of this before.

But, I just knew I had to talk to him. So I took off my shoes without any hesitation. We talked about several items and some general information that I needed to know. After 2 or 3 hours, toward the end of the visit, I asked, *Sheikh* Saad: "What are Muslims? Is that the religion?" He explained to me about God and what Muslims believe in.

I asked about the 9/11 situation, and he explained everything to me as I had no idea. I asked *Sheikh* Saad: "Do you have any books I can read on your religion. I would like to know and learn more." He said: "Yes I do."

He handed me several books for me to read. I received the English translation of the Quran, *The Religion of Truth, A Brief Illustrated Guide to Understand Islam* and other books.

After my time with *Sheikh* Saad had ended, I called Julie to let her know I was done and that she could pick me up now. As I got up, I went to shake his hand as I also went to shake *Imam* Taha's hand, but he did not shake my hand. I was really confused by this as why he did not shake my hand.

At first, I thought: "Wow, Muslims don't shake hands, how rude!" I asked how come you don't shake hands and he explained to me why, and I understood and it all made sense. He answered my questions.

But no, I did not marry this person I had met on Arab Match, as he was in Saudi Arabia, not Los Angeles, which he later told me. It was going to be too complicated to deal

with, so I decided to leave it up to God for my future soul mate and me.

As I got up, I thanked *Sheikh* Saad for his kindness and spending the extra time with me to explain things to me to understand more. I thanked the others around me and put my shoes on and headed outside. My friend was waiting for me.

Sheikh Saad was also coming out, and I wanted him to know this was my friend who brought me over to see you *Sheikh* Saad; I introduced her to him and him to her. I wanted her to know how nice he was and they (Muslims) are not bad people at all. I told *Sheikh* Saad, once I get a car, I will come back to ask more questions.

During the next couple of weeks, I started reading *The Religion of Truth* and read about Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him), being the Messenger of God. I think there was a reason for me to go see *Sheikh* Taha and *Sheikh* Saad as I have been searching for a true religion for me and what I would believe in.

I Read and I Believed

On June 8th, as I read I began to have tears in my eyes and could not believe what I was reading. I felt chills all over my body as I continued to read in *The Religion of Truth*. That night, I wrote in my book: "I believe" and dated it June 8th, 2007. This was on page 20.

I had uncontrollable tears in my eyes, and I could not understand why. My heart, my body, my soul felt different now. The way I thought, did things and the way I felt about people in general opened my mind up. I now knew I had to do something about this and I wanted to convert but did not know how.

So, within that week I was able to get a car, register and get insurance. The first place I wanted to go to was the mosque to see *Sheikh Saad* and ask him how do I convert to this religion, as I felt it very strongly in my heart.

On June 23, I showed up at the mosque. I went upstairs and saw some sisters talking to a couple of Christian women with Latifa, Aimag, Sharifa, Brittany McKnight and Bayann Gouda.

This is when I asked Sharifa what do I do to convert to this religion? I told her I was reading *The Religion of Truth* and now I wanted to convert to being a Muslim and did not know how.

I read the Testimony of Faith on page 65 of *A Brief Illustrated Guide to Understanding Islam*, and there with the sisters upstairs, I did my *Shahadah* in front of the girls in the Masjid. That night, June 23, 2007, I became an American Muslim.

I told her I came to see *Sheikh Saad*, she told me he was not there anymore. I was very upset as he was the one who I looked up to. It was *Sheikh Saad* who gave me these books, and I wanted him to know personally how happy I was.

The sisters called down to the office where there was brother Munir, *Sheikh Muhammad* and others to witness my *Shahadah*. We waited for the call to come down. Then that night on June 23rd, with Munir, Muhammad, Brittany, Sharifa and several other witnesses, I became a Muslim.

As far as my family goes, my mother, father, grandmother and grandfather have passed away. My brother and his 3 kids and Uncle Jr and my cousins are the only ones I have.

I called up my Uncle Jr. and told him: "I wanted to tell you something, but don't get mad ok." He said: "Sure honey, what is it?"

I started off with how I used to be Mormon but did not believe in the Church and I have been searching for a religion for a long time. I then just said, I converted to Islam, and I am now a Muslim.

I was very surprised to his reaction as he had none. He was like: "Ok honey, I don't care what you convert to, I still love ya." I said: "Ok cool, I love you." It was all good.

Now my brother on the other hand, is not so open minded to what I have done. I am sure my cousins have told him about me as I have not yet told him. I know his temper and don't want to hear it from him.

I finally told my cousins by email as they are strong Mormon Church goers. She responded back to me with: "What? You deny Jesus Christ your savior!!!" She was not happy at all.

We did not communicate for some time until this year she emailed me Happy Easter in LARGE LETTERS. Just this

week June 30, 2008, for the first time I sent her three of my pictures with my hijab on and copied and pasted information about Islam and what it means. I asked her to please understand. So far, I have not heard back from her regarding my pictures.

As far as friends are concerned, it seems my neighbor and I don't talk as much as we used to or hang out at all anymore. My friend Christine and I don't hang out at all now as she has not returned any of my calls.

I called her to go out and celebrate my birthday and have dinner back in May of this year 2008. The first question she asked was, "Are you still doing that Muslim thing?" I said: "Yes." She then said: "Hey Ethel, let me call you back, ok?" she never did.

At one point one of my neighbors used red lipstick and wrote on my car when they saw me dressed in my *abaya* and scarf.

Please read the story [here](#).

Story 5

Like a New Born Child

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Being brought up in a Catholic Christian household I always felt the importance of being in a religion, and respecting the will of God.

However even from an early age I sensed that the religion I was brought up in was not quite what I expected.

My earliest memories bring me to a typical Sunday scene sitting in church and looking around me, not digesting what the priest was saying, and staring at a hall full of statues and paintings of various "religious" scenes and persons.

I always remember asking myself: "Can this be it? Is this the truth? Can this massive symbol of a cross that everyone kneels and bows to, be the true meaning of God? And can this priest dressed in all his luxurious garments of silk and gold be the essence of piety and humbleness and subservience to the Most Divine?"



Somehow I felt inside me, that something wasn't quite right. The mere fact that Jesus (peace be upon him) was given a godly status in the Christian religion instead of being accepted as one of Allah's Prophets made my stomach twist and turn. It was something which I just could not accept, and this was the first sign that made me understand that I was no longer Christian, but something else.

After just turning 18 I decided I would go to University and get a degree, but at the same time, find the chance to get out of the Christian household I was in, and find the peace and freedom to do some soul searching!

Indeed Allah blessed me with this chance, since it proved to be the best decision I made in my life.

Attending university I came across many cultures and backgrounds, and many people who would come in and out of my life who helped me in my path.

My first encounter with Islam was through different Muslims from Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Egypt, Pakistan, Turkey, Italy, United Kingdom and many more countries. All these friends in fact came into my life at the most

appropriate time, a time when I needed information about religion.

But I do remember an occasion in 2001 (which I think was my first REAL introduction to Islam) when I visited a friend and seeing for the first time the Quran standing directly opposite me on a bookshelf. Just by looking at it, I got this urge and curiosity to look and read what was inside.

Naturally it was written in its original language, in Arabic, and I couldn't understand a thing, but my friend began to calmly explain what I was seeing! Was it a coincidence that most people I came across were Muslims? I think NOT.

My reversion to Islam happened quite gradually after that, approximately 1 year later. I specifically remember saying to myself one day just before the beginning of Ramadan in 2002 "Shall I go to church today? Why should I go? Who am I kidding?"

I don't believe that Jesus (peace and blessings on him) is the son of God, so why should I go to church. I am not going to church to please my parents, nor am I going there

to please other Christians any more. I want a religion that pleases God and is for God and only God.

I want to thank God more than once a week or twice a week for all the blessings I have. I want to thank Him every day, 5 times or more if I can, not every Sunday.” This on its own made me think, it made me think that I was happy to believe in God as one complete whole, not divided into three parts.

Reading the Quran and the life of the Prophet (peace be upon him) I came to realize that I did believe he was a messenger of God, and in fact the last of God’s messengers. I also began to pray at this time, and started my first fast ever that year in Ramadan.

After obtaining a lot of information about Islam and asking all the questions I needed to know their answers; I finally came into the world like a new-born child. What can only be described as ‘LIGHT’ was suddenly shone upon me. I decided when Ramadan had finished and we had celebrated *Eid* that there was no way I was going to be anything else BUT Muslim, and that was my deciding moment.

After so many years of being blind, and walking in the dark, one day, Allah the Most Gracious Most Merciful shone the torch in my eyes, and I woke up from the trance, from the illness, from the blindness I was trapped in for so long.

My reversion to Islam has let me be more peaceful as an individual, I feel I make the correct *Insha' Allah* decisions most of the time and above all I feel that I try to live my life in light of Allah's wishes. What made me do it?

The simple and so logical words. The clearest and most perfect words that have ever reached human ears. "*La ilaha il Allah, Muhammed Rasoull Allah*". This sentence was the defining moment in my life which made me become a Muslim, and to this day, I have never looked back. Allah is One and Whole and Perfect and Muhammad was His last Prophet.

The Quran for me is like a manual, just like a car needs a manual to function properly, the Quran is the guide-book to life, and something which covers all areas and is something which we cannot live without.

I am proud to be Cypriot and Muslim *Alhamdulillah*. This is not because I am proud of my ethnicity, but it is because Allah's power crosses barriers and reaches to all corners of the globe. Living in the free part of Cyprus unfortunately means access to Muslims, Islamic books and centers is sparse. Does this discourage me? Not at all! In fact I love Islam more every day because of it!

My parents found out about my reversion to Islam during Ramadan 2005, and this was because I felt it was better to tell them my news while I was near them and not away studying at university.

I felt that it was important to be around them when I delivered this news, so that they knew I hadn't run away from them and deserted them. In fact I wanted them to see me and how I had become because of Islam, and to slowly *Insha'Allah* enter the faith themselves by trying to set a good example.

My father reacted very well to the news, and appreciates my views as an individual and *Alhamdulillah* has shown willingness to read some books about Islam; however my mother's reaction was not as calm. I feel that this is more because she is afraid for me, due to the fact that she knows

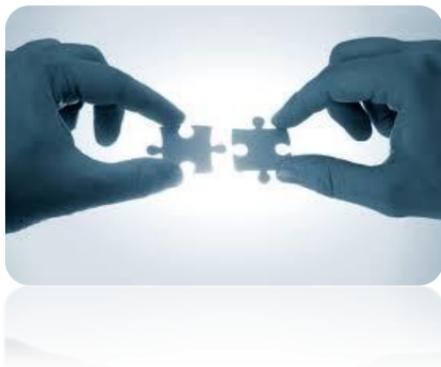
little about Islam, but *Al-hamdulillah* we have also began to talk about the faith and she also is becoming more accepting.

After I graduated from University with my undergraduate degree and Master's Degree I am now working as a trainee in a large company and feel that Allah has allowed me to make great progress as an individual.

If I could give any advice to anyone it would be:

“Listen to your heart, listen to the signs, listen to the words, LISTEN, the truth is there, embrace it, this life is not forever.”

Please read the story at [this](#) link.



Story 6

Falling in Love with Islam

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STORY SIX

**Falling in Love
with Islam**

This is always the hardest part - to begin to write everything down when I myself do not understand it all.

What has happened to me is great and makes me warm and fuzzy inside. But, at the same time it scares me very much.

I now have two worlds, which are very different from one another...and their relationship has never been the best. I feel as though I am standing in the middle of them, with my left foot in one world and my right foot in the other. I fear that I have not fully recovered from the entire shock, which was coupled with ignorance of the differences between my old world and my new one. This is partly caused by the fact that the two are so incredibly different.

The Middle East and the West share a violent history, which unfortunately influences how the West looks upon Islam. Islam is perceived as something evil, corrupt and dangerous, when in fact, it is not. It is something very special and marvelous. Just look at the word "Islam" and what it means. It means "to surrender yourself to God and Him alone." Every human being is born with the natural tendency and desire to surrender to God.

The way I fell in love with Islam is actually a bit bizarre. A book I am writing, which contains strong Islamic and Middle-Eastern influences, was the catalyst. I always found the Middle East incredibly fascinating. To write this book however, I had to do a lot of research. The more I read about Islam the better I began to understand it. Through this newfound comprehension and understanding, I could see and describe things I previously was blinded to.

One day, a tidal wave of inspiration engulfed me and I started to type whatever came to my mind - the things that happened and so on. My poor fingers religiously attempted to keep up with the pace of my brain, which was going too fast and almost on its own. When I re-read the pages, I was deeply moved by their depth and intensity. I think I stared at my monitor for at least half an hour. For a minute I finally recognized myself and suddenly I could pinpoint that emptiness inside me. Then, I realized what I wanted to do. I wanted to become a Muslim! Just by saying it I scared myself and I had to blush. It was as if I was speaking of things that are forbidden.

I still cannot comprehend how this could have happened. But, I can only guess that I must have had this need and desire all along. After that first impact, Islam has never released me. In fact, I was so taken by it that almost immediate results came about, in a way I still cannot comprehend.

Music (mostly dark Gothic music, Heavy metal, Punk, Hanson), which I always enjoyed listening to, now became improper. I abandoned clothing that was too revealing or too tight. Everything I had doubts about, I removed from my room, literally turning it upside down (I will get around to fixing it again soon).

At that point, the euphoric feelings traded places with those of fear and insecurity, which I wanted to push away from me. I kept telling myself that I could not do it and that I was not strong enough. Excuses and more excuses. Then slowly, you start to talk to people about it, which only succeeds in further discouraging you. I did not have Internet at the time and information was sparse, certainly in the place I live, a small fishing community in the Netherlands.

I went to the tourist information office and found one person I could talk to, but I was not yet brave enough to call. After that, I went to the library. As I did not have a library card, I had to read the books there and since time was sparse I again became stressed. One of the books that I picked up off the shelf was the Muslim Woman's Handbook. But, I could NEVER do THAT! You begin to see all these Arabic words that you do not understand; and names that did not sound Dutch began to terrify me even more. The book almost made it sound like Islam was an exclusive club. What if I was not even allowed to become a Muslim? What if I had to be born a Muslim? As a result, more insecurity and more fears.

By reading the various books, I started to realize what a poor and wrong life I had lived. It was something that no minister or priest had been able to clarify for me. And here I was finding it out on my own, in the book that had been written by Muslim women. I felt deeply ashamed. I felt ashamed of my former hostile attitude towards Muslim women and my inheritance of the West.

I did not eat, drink or sleep much during the last couple of days. I was really bothered and I wanted to know more

but I just did not know how to go about it. I felt a strong desire to seek out a contact, but I was scared to make the first move. Boy, aren't I the brave one? Honestly, I am not the bravest person and to take those first steps was not an easy task.

I remember a few days ago, where I went to bed, sat on my knees and called out to myself, "There is no God but God alone, and Muhammad is His Prophet," though not in Arabic because at that time I knew very little. After I got under the sheets, I broke into tears. When I describe this special moment I still feel very emotional about it.

When I told my mother as such, she laughed and mocked me, saying, "I really do not see you walking around in a headscarf!" However, I do understand how she feels. She is in pain because, according to her, I have gone astray. She is hurt because I cannot accept Jesus in the way that Christians do, but that I can accept Muhammad as a prophet of God. As soon as I told her about my desire to become a Muslim, we got into heated discussions where she demanded her rights over me as my mother. I could not give them to her, so I left in the middle of the argument.

When I was at the door she tried to convince me that Islam was bad and that it was especially so for women as they "lose their rights", "have no life of their own"; and that the religion only exists to "dictate sex segregation". I let out a deep distorted sigh and realized that this was going to be very difficult, but nonetheless, I still wanted to go through with it. The will and desire were there, although I still do not fully know how.

Things between my mother and I have changed. We have solved our differences and her fear has now changed into genuine interest. I also bought her a small book, entitled Islam for Beginners and it seems to help her a lot. Through Allah, I now can better understand my mother and this mutual understanding has made our relationship stronger.

The reactions of the rest of the family were somewhat stiff in the beginning, but in general, they had a positive impression. This is mainly because, for all of us, many things are still unclear and my family does not entirely know where this journey will take me. But, I feel that these insecurities will decrease as I grow stronger in my beliefs.

Now, my family members are asking me more questions, which I think is a very positive step. I am also very

thankful to Allah, because my family's impressions regarding my new life have been complimentary and encouraging. They see me change, almost daily, and none have yet to say that what I do or show them is wrong. *Alhamdulillah*. That makes me feel really good.

I hope that I do not offend any of you and that none of you are sighing all the way through my story. It is correct that I feel a certain shame, and certain fearfulness that I need to overcome. I am convinced that I will overcome them. It is just that at this time, I am very afraid of doing the wrong things. I just want to do everything right...always!

The first thing I have to do is continue acquiring knowledge because I feel in my entire soul that Allah is the Good, the Merciful and the Generous.

How badly I have organized my life and how poorly I have ordered it, continues to hurt me... and very much so. How very wrong some of the things I have done have been. To realize this can be quite a painful experience.

However, my biggest fear is that I will not be accepted. I have reasons for that fear, since other religious

communities have denied me access because they could not accept me "due to personal reasons".

I cannot change who or what I am. That is how I was born. The things in the past are exactly that - in the past - and I cannot change them. The only things I wish and desire are to contribute in a positive manner and to become a better person.

Please read the story [here](#).





Although a new Muslim may find him/herself encountering some awkward situations, in reality converting to Islam will be a wondrous and eye-opening journey, and you will be amazed at the improvements in your outlook, frame of mind, and habits.

Keeping a journal is one means of recording how you feel. Looking back on these recordings, you may see some pattern of how you feel including your highs and lows.

While being a new convert/revert, you may get excited arguing over a particular point in Islam getting carried away in heated debates. It is important to remember still that words carry a lot of weight in this world from how we say them to what we say with them, but it is through our actions that we bring things into being.

In many cases, what we say does not necessarily line up with what we do, and it becomes clear that it's easier to talk about doing something than it is to actually do it. At the same time, it is easy to keep doing something that we don't necessarily acknowledge ourselves doing verbally.

As Muslims, it is good for us to take a look every once and a while to make sure there is alignment between what we say and what we do and through this demonstrating the

beauty of our religion through actions rather than words. Remember you now represent Islam and you may influence those who wish to follow your example.

Away from the duties of praying, fasting and reading the Quran, there are many small things that may help strengthen the foundations of this wonderful faith and maybe, in turn, encourage others to follow your example and join you in your newly found faith.

While you may feel you're given a certain list of do's and don'ts, remember that Islam is much simpler than a written catalog for you to learn. For support, find forums, advice and chat with groups who share this life experience. These sites and discussion boards will definitely help you adjust to your new life, deal with day to day issues and help you to reach your full Muslim potential and in turn becoming the best Muslim you can be.

Bear in mind that Islam is a way of life, completely submitting yourself to God and in turn reaping the rewards of this simple and wholesome recipe. The Prophet said:

"So know that victory is with patience, and relief is with distress and that with hardship comes ease."
(Ahmad)

May Allah (SWT) always be with you in your journey in learning and practicing Islam, and may He always guide you to His Straight Path, and give you a blessed and happy life, here and in the Hereafter.

Ameen.

