

DR CHRIS JAMES, EX-JEW, UK (PART 2 OF 2)

Rating: 4.5

Description: Description: How the call to pray (Adhan) had an everlasting impact on Dr. Chris. Part 2: A desire for equality and justice and finding Islam to provide solutions to humanity, finally led her to convert to Islam.

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I knew very little about Islam, except like Judaism, there was only one God. Then on one Friday evening the New York Central Synagogue invited the local Imam to share the Jewish service. The Rabbi prayed in Hebrew and the Imam prayed in Arabic. It reminded me of Marrakech. Every Jewish Shabbat after that I carried the Imam's prayer in my mind. I prayed in Hebrew and in my mind I could hear the Imam praying in Arabic.

After I returned from Morocco I worked in London for several years and then travelled to South Africa. I took up residence in Johannesburg. There I learned the meaning of apartheid. Having grown up with antisemitism, apartheid did not sit well with me. It was a cruel dehumanizing structure of torture and oppression. I could not stay silent. I was working as an artist and expressing my views in my work, but the galleries would not take my paintings, they were too political. However, after several years I had gathered a radical following, but it became too dangerous to continue my protest so I very discreetly took a night time flight out of Johannesburg to Rome. I left with just one change of clothes and seemingly before the authorities came knocking at the door of my South African residence.

After a few weeks I was back in London working for a major news corporation and planning a trip to Australia. I spent two years in London before leaving. The country of Australia was not what I expected, people called it the 'lucky country', but it was only beneficial to those who were white, middle class and male. For several decades Australia had promulgated an All White Australia Policy and the indigenous people, whose numbers were greatly reduced by massacres, lived in terrible poverty with no human rights or status.

I had inherited a sense of justice, so in Australia my campaigning started over again. While still at school I had joined the peace movement. In South Africa I had tried to set up multiracial unions. In Australia I joined the Womens' Electoral Lobby and sat on the boards of the Crime Prevention Council and the Council for Civil Liberties. I was also on

the committee of the Human Rights Association. My life was spiraling towards a political career, but there was something greatly missing.

Several years passed before I went to university and took comparative religious studies. Judaism became meaningful in my life once again, but for different reasons. I was not a Zionist and I was against nationalism. I believed in one God, one people and one religion. I tried to fit Judaism into this picture, but it was like putting a square box into a round hole.

More recently, I devoted twelve months to creating a collection of paintings based on the Torah which went on exhibition at the Jewish Arts Centre in Melbourne in 2019. It felt nice being back in the fold, but when the exhibition was over and the exhilaration had died down, I was still feeling a lack of commitment. I left the city and went back to my rural property even more aware of the grievances I had with Judaism. I tried to sugar-coat my feelings with positive affirmations, but the peace activist in me kept recalling the faces of children caught up in the Middle East wars... Iraq, Afghanistan, Yemen, Palestine. I had campaigned against all of them. Against these scenes there was the valourization of Israel. My Israel! What had they done to it?

It was Israel's latest attack on Palestine in 2021 that was the final straw for me. I was reading news reports between watching YouTube videos on Islam. Islam was a religion of peace. The west had greatly distorted the meaning of Islam. Western nations were renowned for rescuing people from tyrannical rule, but when did they ever come to the rescue of Muslims? There were many questions on many issues.

I bought a copy of Seyyed Housein Nasr's Study Qur'an and began reading it. I came to believe that Islam had answers to some of the world's most crucial social problems, so I made the decision to become a Muslim. I want to see change. I am 73 years old, but it is not too late to want to be a part of that conversation.

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