

IMAN YUSUF, EX-CATHOLIC, USA (PART 1 OF 4)

Rating: 3.5

Description: How God showed her the way when she was yearning to find the way towards Him.

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The conversion to Islam by any human being is always cause for wonder, and the greatest mercy Allah can give to those He loves. Yet in my case, it was so much more. Truly it was a miracle, alhamdulillah (all praise be to God).

Before I ever knew the word Islam, or what exactly a “Muslim” was, Allah guided me by my *fitrah* (God-given inborn nature) to deduce — with my heart and mind — exactly how He wanted me to live. It is an amazing story, and all praise is due to the One who guided me.

Beginning in the summer of 1981, this gift of Islam was bestowed upon me slowly over a period of one year, during the lowest and most challenging point in my life.

I was born and raised in the USA, however my great-grandparents were from Germany and Austria.

I was a devout Roman Catholic — devout as in fully practicing and believing wholeheartedly in my faith. My marriage was failing, due mainly to the fact that my husband was not only a non-Catholic, but an atheist as well.

Although this disturbed me, it was not a cause for serious problems in my marriage until after my daughter was born in 1979. From that point on, it became a constant source of frustration and pain.

While he did allow me to have her baptized, he was not keen for her to be raised in any religion. No amount of discussion would budge him, nor did reminding him that when he married me, he had signed a paper in the church, promising any children born of this marriage to be raised as Catholics.

He simply refused the idea of her growing up believing in any deity or faith at all and in fact began to make fun not only of my beliefs, but of God as well.

I scheduled a meeting with a priest I’d known for many years, hoping he could guide me in this matter. He gave me little comfort. I felt he didn’t take this subject as seriously as

I did.

He seemed more concerned with my saving the marriage than he was with the issue of my daughter's faith. He couldn't quite grasp the pain I felt each time I heard my husband curse or joke about God.

Nor did he understand how devastating this would be to my daughter, who would definitely receive a horribly mixed message as she grew. I feared the day would come when my husband might actually prevent either of us from going to church.

Somehow, our conversation veered off into another direction, and we begin to discuss principles of Catholicism. Although I don't remember it now, I asked a question about the trinity.

I received the standard answer...three Gods in one divine person. When I pressed the issue further, the priest became very agitated and informed me that if I needed to ask questions like that to begin with, I had no faith at all.

While I can understand his reaction now — that it was due to the fact that he had no better explanation for this “mystery” than I did, at the time I was shocked and hurt.

I felt as if I had been literally expelled from the church. With one innocent question, and the desire to come closer to God, I had been deemed a person of no faith at all.

I quickly made my exit, and thought long and hard about the priest's remarks. I simply refused to accept his opinion of me. I knew I was a person of great faith and reliance upon God, and no human could convince me otherwise.

But from that moment on, I no longer considered myself a Catholic. There was so much turmoil in the church at the time, and people were leaving the religion in droves. While I never imagined I would be one of them, suddenly, I was.

Without looking backwards, I went in search of the truth. I tried briefly to just read and study the Bible — a book of which I amazingly had little knowledge. Catholics focus more on church catechism than Bible reading.

I found the Bible difficult to understand, disjointed, and with little guidance on how I was to live my daily life. To me it seemed more like a story book.

In hopes that I was wrong, I contacted a local Christian church and asked if I might join in religious lessons. My first exposure to them was my last. They were evangelicals and focused heavily on talking in “tongues” and receiving the “gift” of the Holy Spirit.

It was just too out there for me. I needed a religion that I could keep constantly in my heart, not something I had to conjure up with ghosts and dead languages.

After that I turned to the study of Judaism, which I had always been told was the “true” and first religion of man. I soon found myself excluded from this club also because I was not born of a Jewish mother.

Although conversion was possible, it was mostly unaccepted by the Jews themselves, especially the orthodox. Further, it was this belief of Jews as God’s chosen people that seriously troubled me.

I could not imagine a God who made His religion available only to those who were born into it, and then despite their deeds — good or bad, would be the only people admitted to Heaven based on a birthright. It didn’t seem fair, and I was sure God was nothing if not just.

And so began a whirlwind of study of every religion I could find. Hinduism, Buddhism, Tao, Confucius, Hare Krishna...I studied them all and rejected them faster and faster. I looked into everything except Islam. I didn’t even know it existed.

And I understand the reason why Allah allowed me to investigate the other faiths first. So that when I eventually found Islam, I would be 100% certain it was the only true religion.

At that point, I was very depressed. I was in the midst of divorce proceedings by then and living back home, caring for my ailing grandfather. My dear grandmother, my best friend in all the world and truly the only “mother” I ever knew, had died unexpectedly the past winter, and my mother was not interested in my quest for enlightenment. I felt so alone.

I was trying to juggle returning to college full-time, an active daughter, a sick grandfather, housekeeping and worst of all, my distance from God. I had no beliefs left, just the knowledge that there was a God. I was a blank slate.

Every previous notion of God wiped away, except for the certainty He did exist, and based on that alone, I prayed to Him, continuously and always begged for His guidance.

Over an agonizing period of a few months, I tried thinking logically in my journey to find Him. If there was a God, I reasoned, surely He had His own unique way in which He wanted us to know Him.

A way in which we could truly worship and connect with Him, all the while making Him a constant part of our daily lives, not just something to be taken out once a week, then put away for the remainder.

But above all else, in my mind I told myself, One God, One Way. All these religions laying claim to God, yet such divergent paths. No, I could not accept there was anyway to God but one way. I needed only to find that way.

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