

RADKO, EX-ATHEIST, CZECH (PART 2 OF 2): A SEWN SEED GROWS TALL AND STRONG

Rating: 4.7

Description: A meeting with an Iraqi sparks a once atheist Christian's interest in Islam.

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In July 2001, I met a young man from Iraq. His name was Ibrahim. We very quickly struck up a conversation. He told me that he was Muslim, and I responded that I was Christian. I was worried that my being Christian would be a problem, but I was wrong. I was glad to be wrong. It was interesting that I did not want to become Muslim and he did not try to convert me.

Although I considered Muslims an exotic group, I had been interested to learn more about Islam. It was a good opportunity to learn more. I realized that I had in front of me a man who could teach me a lot about Islam, so I mustered the courage to ask him to do just that. That was my first meeting with Islam, indeed my first step. After some time we parted ways, and I did not see him again, but the seed had been sown.

I remember once reading an interview with Mohammad Ali Silhavy (an old Czech Muslim) and being eager to find his address and write him a letter. Then came September 11. Because of the political climate, I thought it might not be an appropriate time to contact Mr. Silhavy. So I found myself at a dead end.

About two months later I found the courage to write a long letter to Mr. Silhavy. After a while he replied and sent a package including Islamic literature and leaflets. He told me that he had informed the Islamic Foundation in Prague about me and asked them to send me the translation of the Qur'an. So this was my beginning. Step by step, I learned that not only is Islam not a militant religion, but to the contrary, it is a religion of peace. My questions were answered.

Because of certain circumstances, it wasn't until three years later that I decided to visit Mr. Silhavy. He showed a lot of patience while explaining to me different issues, and suggested that I visit the mosque of Brno (Czech Republic). When I went to the mosque of Brno, I was afraid that I would be seen as a stranger, an outsider. How surprised I was to find quite the opposite. I met K. and L., who were the first persons to help me. Of course, I met other brothers who welcomed me in the warmest way possible way.

I began to delve into all aspects of Islam, and found how understandable and logical Islam is. I gradually started to learn how to pray, and today I master prayer with no problem, even in Arabic. I gave up a bad habit of mine that was not compatible with Islam. I was a gambler and a very good one indeed. It was a difficult struggle with myself, but with God's help I won that battle.

If I ever doubted my interest in Islam or whether I could live as a Muslim, I know now that my interest is permanent and I consider myself one of them. Maybe it looks very simple, but again with God's help I won this internal struggle. I thought carefully before I definitively decided to embrace Islam. To be honest, throughout 2003 and the beginning of 2004, I was not completely sure if I could manage this. Finally I decided definitively. I am not that young man from the early '90s anymore.

That's why today I feel very happy that I am Muslim. I finally feel free. I still have my imperfections but I am trying to improve upon them. I believe that God will help me. Now, listen to what I want to tell you and consider this my obligation: I believe in my heart and declare by word that there is no other god but God and Muhammad is God's Messenger.

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